


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conceiving an Alternative: The Ideological Underpinnings and Political Blueprints of Chinese Federalism

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Abstract

This article contributes to the hitherto limited scholarship on the Chinese federalist movement in the 1910s and 1920s by conducting a thorough investigation of its ideological underpinnings and political blueprints. It compares the federalist ideas, plans, and activism of three thinkers—Zhang Taiyan, Zhang Shizhao, and Chen Jiongmíng—who stood firmly against the centralist trajectory of state-building in China after 1911 and advocated the formation of a Chinese federation. It argues that Chinese federalists, instead of emulating Western models, critically engaged with a broad spectrum of ideologies—Daoism, Buddhism, social Darwinism, parliamentarianism, guild socialism, anarchism etc.—when formulating their federalist agendas. Emphasizing the Chinese tradition of self-government, which underwent reinterpretations during the late Qing and early Republican periods, this article examines the extent to which Chinese federalism presented an alternative to Western political modernity.

Keywords: federalism; local self-government; centralism; parliament; democracy; Zhang Taiyan; Zhang Shizhao; Chen Jiongmíng

From Local Self-Government to Federal Self-Government

In the 1910s and 1920s, a federalist movement emerged in China as an extension of the prevalent local self-government activism (*difang zizhi* 地方自治) in the late Qing, contributing to the political reform and state-building of the newborn republic. The causes of the movement were manifold: Above all, provincial uprisings against the Qing government and later against the Beiyang government under Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 fueled provincialist sentiments. Furthermore, the establishment of provincial legislative assemblies (*sheng yihui* 省議會)—based on the twenty-one provincial assemblies (*sheng ziyiju* 省咨議局) formed during the last years of the Qing—institutionalized the increasing attempts at provincial self-government. Finally, Yuan Shikai's death in 1916 further exacerbated political and military fragmentation, leading to warlordism. Many military strongmen, especially those in the south, not only established their regimes on a

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provincial basis but also advocated provincial autonomy.¹ Despite the increasing clamor for provincial self-government during this period, “federalism” did not crystallize into a political discourse and nationwide movement until the autumn of 1920, when Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 published his article “On Federal Self-Government and the Devolution of Central Power.”²

In the autumn of 1920, encouraged by recent attainments of provincial self-government, especially Hunan’s recovery of the provincial government from Beiyang powers as well as Sichuan’s and Guangdong’s successful defense of territories from military intrusions of neighboring provinces, Zhang Taiyan proposed a system named “federal self-government” (*liansheng zizhi* 聯省自治, literally translated as united provinces of self-government) to endorse provincial autonomy on the one hand and realize a Chinese federation on the other. Zhang Taiyan’s call for federal self-government served as a catalyst for the Chinese federalist movement. His article was published right after an academic symposium in Changsha, where prominent thinkers such as John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, Zhang Dongsun 張東蓀, and Zhang himself met to discuss China’s political crisis as well as the potential of provincial self-government. It therefore provided a timely ideological framework for Chinese intellectuals to synchronize their ideas on federalism.³ In the meantime, his telegrams, addressed to military strongmen of the southern provinces, particularly Tan Yankai 譚延闓 and Zhao Hengti 趙恒惕 of Hunan and Chen Jiongming 陳炯明 of Guangdong, urged their collective commitment to realizing federal self-government at least in South China.⁴ The term “federal self-government” gained immediate traction. It resonated with supporters and was swiftly adopted by newspapers to represent the increasingly fervent, yet hitherto fragmented, federalist activism in China.⁵

Compared to the concept of “local self-government,” that of “federal self-government,” or federalism, has been much less explored in the historiography of the late-Qing and early Republic. As Arthur Waldron notes, federalism is mentioned only once in the relevant volume of *The Cambridge History of China*, and its assessment is along the lines laid down by Jean Chesneau in the 1960s. It is defined as “a movement of the traditional and conservative forces of Chinese society, of the gentry of the southern and central provinces and of the local warlords.”⁶ Waldron criticizes the essentialist perspective and derogatory tone present in this assessment, which, he believes, entirely misses two crucial facts: Firstly, federalist ideas had been advocated in good faith since the late nineteenth century for China’s renewal; and secondly,

¹Keith Schoppa, “Province and Nation: The Chekiang Provincial Autonomy Movement, 1917–1927,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 36 (1977), 664–67; Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 183.

²Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, “Liansheng zizhi xuzhi zhengfu yi” 聯省自治虛置政府議, *Dagongbao* 大公報, November 4, 1920, 7.

³For more information on the Shangsha symposium, please see Vivienne Xiangwei Guo, *Negotiating a Chinese Federation: The Exchange of Ideas and Political Collaborations Between China’s Men of Guns and Men of Letters, 1919–1923* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 80–87.

⁴“Zhang Taiyan zhi Chen Jingcun dian—qing lianhe liusheng litu zizhi” 章太炎致陳競存電—請聯合六省力圖自治 *Dagongbao*, November 1, 1920, 6; “Zhang Taiyan dongdian zhi zhuzhang—tongyi liansheng zizhi zhi ming, gongjie fuyong peifan zhi qiao” 章太炎冬電之主張—同依聯省自治之名, 共解附庸陪藩之誚, *Dagongbao*, November 7, 1920, 6.

⁵Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 187.

⁶Arthur Waldron, “Warlordism Versus Federalism: The Revival of a Debate?” *The China Quarterly* no. 121 (1990), 117.

many Chinese advocated federalism because they saw it as a cure for warlordism.⁷ Although Waldron's short article does not delve into the specifics of the Chinese federalist movement, it highlights the roots of warlordism and explains why federalists deemed federal self-government the only solution. Hu Shi, a prominent intellectual and supporter of the federalist movement, argued in 1922 that the fundamental cause of warlordism lay in the attempt to unify China by force of arms from above. Believing that China was too large to sustain a centralized system, Hu emphasized the necessity of fostering local self-government and cultivating civil society as the best means for China to end the cycle of violence and achieve real unification.⁸

The federalist movement in China was not simply an instrumental solution to warlordism. Instead, it had its roots in the ideas and praxis of local self-government in the late-Qing period. Scholars concur that the apparent inadequacy of Qing administration facilitated active involvement of local elites in providing public goods and fostered the idea of local self-government.⁹ In the seventeenth century, eminent thinkers Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 and Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 had already championed administrative reforms along the lines of "letting the locals manage local affairs." Two centuries later, Feng Guifen 馮桂芬, a prominent late-Qing reformer, drew upon these ideas and advocated local self-government at the subcounty level, overseen by a quasi-official chosen by the people of the locality.¹⁰ Stressing the significant influences of Gu's and Huang's thought, scholars have explored the ideological attributes of late-Qing local self-government. Roger Thompson traces the intellectual lineage of the *jingshi* 經世 (statecraft) school, of which Gu and Huang were pioneers and Feng a crucial heir. Defining *jingshi* as practical political thought and action, Thompson asserts that it facilitated autonomous local initiatives without hindering the state-building tasks during late-Qing reforms.¹¹ Instead of *jingshi*, Prasenjit Duara focuses on the tradition of *fengjian* 封建 (feudalism) as the ideological underpinning of local self-government. For Duara, Gu Yanwu's and Huang Zongxi's ideas not only envisioned a new structure of local administration but also redefined the relationship between local authority and the central state. Gu and Huang turned to the *fengjian* tradition, as opposed to the more centralized *junxian* 郡縣 system, to promote the idea of local autonomy, free from being ruled by officials sent by the central state from outside of the province. They also encouraged the institutionalization of gentry participation at local levels to contain the power of the imperial state.¹² Aligned with Duara's perspective, Theresa Man Ling Lee draws attention to the neo-Confucian aspects within the *fengjian* tradition. Lee notes that for Huang Zongxi, local self-government was not solely about good governance but served as a channel for self-education and self-cultivation. Late-Qing reformers such as Kang Youwei 康有為 and Liang Qichao 梁啟超, adhering to

⁷Waldron, "Warlordism Versus Federalism," 117.

⁸Hu Shi 胡適, "Liansheng zizhi yu junfa geju—da Chen Duxiu" 聯省自治與軍閥割據—答陳獨秀, in *Hu Shi wencun* 2-3 胡適文存第二集第三卷 (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2014), 109-10; Waldron, "Warlordism Versus Federalism," 121-24.

⁹Mary Backus Rankin, "The Origins of a Chinese Public Sphere. Local Elites and Community Affairs in the Late Imperial Period," *Etudes chinoises* 9.2 (1990), 21-24; Roger Thompson, "Statecraft and Self-Government: Competing Visions of Community and State in Late Imperial China," *Modern China* 14.2 (1988), 191.

¹⁰Thompson, "Statecraft and Self-Government," 193.

¹¹Thompson, "Statecraft and Self-Government," 192-93.

¹²Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 153.

neo-Confucian tenets, closely associated local self-government with the cultivation of modern citizens.¹³

In this regard, late-Qing local self-government embodied dialectical—rather than antithetical—relationships between the *private* and the *public*, and between local society and the state. In response to critiques that self-government might breed corruption and factionalism, Feng Guifen, following Gu Yanwu's views, contended that if any kind of civic virtue existed among ordinary Chinese, it was to be found in local settings due to people's natural inclination toward *si 私* (private, familial or communal interests).¹⁴ While Feng perceived *si* as the civic foundation for local self-government, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao saw the potential of self-government in cultivating *gong 公*, namely, public-mindedness. They believed that only through “self-rule” or “self-mastery” would people become public-minded citizens, and only through local self-government would citizens be prepared, administratively and morally, for a modern state.¹⁵ Furthermore, when late-Qing reformers evoked the *fengjian* tradition, their aim was to preserve the autonomy of local society but also to bring this society into a state modernization project.¹⁶ Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽's endorsement of the *xiangshe 鄉社* system in Shanxi and Liang Qichao's advocacy of *fengjian* during the reform movement in Hunan both exemplified how local self-government, drawing from traditional governance principles, facilitated reform initiatives aimed at modernizing and strengthening the Chinese state.¹⁷ As Mary Rankin asserts, unlike the situation in Europe at the same time, elite-led local societies in China were not in conflict with the state, although tension between local and central authorities had become increasingly visible toward the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ Duara, however, is less concerned with aligning the Chinese experience with the Western model of “public sphere” or “civil society.” Instead, he urges further inquiries into *fengjian* as a Chinese tradition of local autonomy and a salient late-Qing narrative of self-government.¹⁹

Despite acknowledging late-Qing local self-government as a precursor to the federalist movement that heightened in the early Republican era, scholars are pessimistic about the continuity of *fengjian* within China's state-building endeavors.²⁰ Duara asserts that the first decades of the twentieth century witnessed the intrusion of the state and the decline of the *fengjian* tradition. Many late-Qing reformers, including Liang Qichao, abandoned *fengjian* to embrace a strong statist discourse and to fulfill the state-building tasks along Western lines. The federalist movement, unfolding against a historical backdrop where the narrative of the nation-state became dominant and the connotations of *fengjian* turned pejorative, thus struggled and ultimately failed to benefit from *fengjian* as a Chinese tradition of local autonomy or as an alternative narrative

¹³Theresa Man Ling Lee, “Local Self-Government in Late Qing: Political Discourse and Moral Reform,” *The Review of Politics* 60.1 (1998), 37–44.

¹⁴Philip A. Kuhn, “Ideas behind China's Modern State,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55.2 (1995), 335–36; Aymeric Xu, *From Culturalist Nationalism to Conservatism: Origins and Diversification of Conservative Ideas in Republican China* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 116.

¹⁵Lee, “Local Self-Government in Late Qing,” 39–44.

¹⁶Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 153–54.

¹⁷Thompson, “Statecraft and Self-Government,” 193–203; Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 154–55.

¹⁸Rankin, “The Origins of a Chinese Public Sphere,” 24.

¹⁹Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 150–52.

²⁰Waldron, “Warlordism Versus Federalism,” 117–18; Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 177.

of state-building. What were the ideological underpinnings of Chinese federalism then? Duara suggests that Chinese federalists were forced to rely on “a series of modern discourses and theories such as social Darwinism, constitutional theories of federalism, and an ingenious coupling of provincial autonomy with popular sovereignty.”²¹ Similarly, Keith Schoppa defines provincialist and federalist activism in Zhejiang between 1917 and 1927 as a “constitutional autonomy movement” empowered by borrowed and adapted classical Western liberal thought.²² In the most recent publication concerning locality and Chinese political culture, Chinese federalist dynamics in the early 1920s are still regarded merely as a form of localism legitimated by “Western political theories.”²³

While the existing scholarship takes it for granted that Chinese federalism echoed Western political values and institutions, it inadequately examines the ways and extent to which Chinese federalism embodied Western political modernity. Did the Chinese tradition of self-government lose its relevance to Chinese federalism entirely? How did Chinese federalists engage with social Darwinism, constitutional principles, the creed of parliamentary democracy, and the concept of popular sovereignty in formulating Chinese federalism? Most importantly, to what degree did Chinese federalists politically, culturally, and philosophically emulate Western models in projecting a Chinese federation?

To address these questions, this article compares the federalist ideas and blueprints proposed by three thinkers: Zhang Taiyan, the architect of federal self-government, Zhang Shizhao 章士釗, a Hunanese political theorist who was the first to systematically theorize federalism and who played an active role in Hunan’s self-government movement, and Chen Jiongming, a Cantonese regional strongman who promoted federal self-government in Guangdong and whose commitment to federalism resulted in a coup d’état against Sun Yat-sen.²⁴ The three case studies are selected for the following reasons: Above all, amidst the multitude of Chinese advocating federal self-government during this period, these three initiated the most elaborate ideas and plans, not only for the materialization of local self-government but also for the formation of a Chinese federation. And they established undisputed intellectual and political leadership throughout the Chinese federalist movement.²⁵ Furthermore, while the three thinkers aligned

²¹Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 170–78.

²²Schoppa, “Province and Nation,” 667.

²³Yongtao Du, “Locality and Local Gazetteers in the Republic: A Case for the Continuity of Spatial Order,” *Journal of Chinese History* 7.1 (2023), 151; Keping Yu, *Democracy Is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009), 157–60.

²⁴Sun Yat-sen and some Kuomintang revolutionaries, whose power base was rooted in the provinces during their uprisings against the Qing and later Yuan Shikai, were among the first Chinese thinkers promoting federalism. Starting from 1897, Sun, on different occasions, expressed his aspiration to establish a Chinese republic along federalist lines. His inaugural speech as the provisional president of the Republic of China in 1912 envisioned a federal unification of provinces based on provincial self-government. However, Sun’s stance on provincial self-government and federalism changed as soon as Yuan died. After 1916, he criticized provincial self-government as a form of centralism at the provincial level and advocated self-government only at the county level. As the federalist movement peaked in the early 1920s, Sun openly repudiated federalism and insisted on unifying China in a centralist manner, resulting in a confrontation between him and federalists such as Zhang Taiyan and Chen Jiongming. For more information, see Hu Chunhui 胡春惠, *Minchu de difang zhuyi yu liansheng zizhi* 民初的地方主義與聯省自治 (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1983), 45–57; Guo, *Negotiating a Chinese Federation*, 117–29.

²⁵Zhejiang, Hunan, and Guangdong were the three southern provinces that witnessed the most vigorous federalist activism and the most successful promulgation of provincial constitutions. As this article will

with one another in pursuing federal self-government, their ideas and plans were influenced by a wide range of ideologies—such as Daoism, Buddhism, social Darwinism, parliamentarianism, guild socialism, and anarchism—thus reflecting the intricate political, cultural, and philosophical dimensions of Chinese federalism.²⁶

In my previous work, I have briefly discussed the efforts of Chinese federalists in addressing the exploitative power of the state and contesting the ideology of the nation-state, which they saw as the ills of Western political modernity.²⁷ Building upon my earlier research, this article expands the investigation into Chinese federalists' engagement with Western political modernity, encompassing not only the political thought and institutions for modern state-building but also the cultural and philosophical norms stemming from the experiences of Enlightenment, industrialization, and capitalism. By investigating the ideological trajectories and political blueprints of Chinese federalists, this article seeks to gauge to what extent Chinese federalism presented an alternative to Western political modernity rather than merely a variation of it.

Social Darwinism, Daoism, and Federal Self-Government

Before becoming a prominent federalist, Zhang Taiyan had been famously a nativist, nationalist, and Han-centrist, promoting a Han Chinese sovereign nation-state. He adhered to Bluntschli's notion of nation and maintained that a nation, entailing fundamental and organic ties such as blood, race, history, language, and custom, was more than a political association.²⁸ His commitment to the survival and rejuvenation of

show, the three thinkers, hailing from these three provinces respectively, profoundly engaged in local self-government activities.

²⁶There exists abundant research on Zhang Taiyan's philological and philosophical attainments and on Zhang Shizhao's political writing. Chen Jiongming, though not a well-researched subject in the intellectual history of modern China, has recently gained scholarly attention for his role in regional reforms. However, while the three have been extensively studied as philologist-philosopher-revolutionary, political theorist, and regional strongman respectively, their involvement in the federalist movement has not been thoroughly examined. There remains limited understanding of their federalist ideas and plans, particularly regarding their intricate ideological interactions within the context the Chinese federalist movement. Important scholarship concerning Zhang Taiyan's thought includes Viren Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: The Resistance of Consciousness* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Wang Fansen 王汎森, *Zhang Taiyan de sixiang jiqi dui ruxue chuantong de dongji* 章太炎的思想及其對儒學傳統的衝擊 (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chubanshe, 1985); Lin Shaoyang 林少陽, *Dingge yiwen—Qingji geming yu Zhang Taiyan fugu de xinwenhua yundong* 鼎革以文—清季革命與章太炎復古的新文化運動 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2018). Significant scholarship concerning Zhang Shizhao's political theories includes Leigh K. Jenco, *Making the Political Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Zou Xiaozhan 鄒小站, *Zhang Shizhao shehui zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu 1903–1927* 章士釗社會政治思想研究 1903–1927 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), and Morikawa Hiroki, *Zhenglunjia de jinchi: Zhang Shizhao, Zhang Dongsun zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu* 政論家的矜持: 章士釗, 張東蓀政治思想研究, translated by Yuan Guangquan 袁廣泉 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2017). And recent scholarship on Chen Jiongming includes Leslie H. Dingyan Chen, *Chen Jiongming and the Federalist Movement: Regional Leadership and Nation Building in Early Republican China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Izabella Goikhman, "Chen Jiongming, Becoming a Warlord in Republican China," in *State, Society and Governance in Republican China*, edited by Mechthild Leutner and Izabella Goikhman (Münster: LIT, 2014), 77–101.

²⁷Guo, *Negotiating a Chinese Federation*, 227–28.

²⁸Zhang applied different criteria in defining a nation and faltered between monogenism and polygenism regarding the origin of human race. Nevertheless, his effort to demarcate a distinctive Han Chinese nation was evident in the early 1900s. Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan*, 72–78; Charlotte Furth, "Culture and Politics in Modern Chinese Conservatism," in *The Limits of Change*:

the Chinese nation underpinned his political leadership during the anti-Manchu movement and the 1911 Revolution. For Zhang Taiyan, the soon-to-be-established republic, or the political nation, would serve as a necessary base where “national essence” (*guocui* 國粹), or the Han Chinese cultural nation, could thrive and prevail.²⁹ As a nationalist (as opposed to imperial loyalists such as Kang Youwei) and, notably, as a revolutionary, Zhang Taiyan is often categorized as “radical” in political terms. Both Charlotte Furth and Prasenjit Duara regard Zhang—and more generally the “national essence” school—as culturally conservative but politically radical.³⁰ Criticizing this dichotomy between the *cultural* and the *political*, Aymeric Xu premises his assessment of “the fusion of the cultural and political nation” on the idea that the *cultural* should be evaluated according to the *political* and that conservatism/radicalism should be gauged with regard to modern Western values. In other words, since Zhang was politically radical (adhering to modern Western political values), he cannot be deemed culturally conservative, at least not in an essentialist sense. Instead, he should be seen as reinterpreting traditional cultural elements in a radical way to legitimate socio-political changes inspired by the West.³¹ The existing interpretation of Zhang Taiyan’s federalist ideas largely corroborates the same teleology. As Duara indicates, politically, federal self-government incorporated the democratic ideology of self-government, while culturally, it discarded the Chinese tradition of self-government to embrace modern Western discourses and theories.³²

Contrary to this interpretation, Zhang Taiyan did not intend his federal self-government to emulate any modern Western example. Rather, he criticized the federal systems of the United States and Germany for allowing the central government to maintain substantial power.³³ Emphasizing “self-government” as the foundation of federal self-government, Zhang made it clear that residents within a province must promulgate their own provincial constitution, directly elect civil and military officials at all levels, and form a provincial army. While discussing “self-government,” he never adopted the term “democracy” (*minzhu* 民主) despite its prevalence in May Fourth writings. Instead, he reverted to Gu Yanwu’s and Feng Guifen’s ideas, suggesting that his faith in self-government rested not upon Western-style institutions, especially the parliamentary system, but upon the moral and emotional bonds among provincial entities. The purpose of such self-government was, as Zhang put it in a candid and lucid manner, to “void” (*xuzhi* 虛置) the central government. According to Zhang, China’s current crisis was caused by the centralization of power within the central government.

Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China, edited by Charlotte Furth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 131; Zhang Taiyan, “Zhonghuaminguo jie” 中華民國解, in *Zhang Taiyan quanji* 4 章太炎全集四 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1982), 252–58.

²⁹Zhang, “Zhonghuaminguo jie,” 260–62.

³⁰Furth, “Culture and Politics in Modern Chinese Conservatism,” 24–28; Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 207.

³¹Xu, “Mapping Conservatism of the Republican Era,” 136–37, 143; Xu, *From Culturalist Nationalism to Conservatism*, 87–89.

³²Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 177, 187.

³³Zhang, “Liansheng zizhi xuzhi zhengfu yi,” 7. Scholars note that while the US Constitution of 1787 was more centralist compared to the Articles of Confederation of 1777, it did safeguard the prerogatives of the states and grant substantial authority to the states over domestic matters. Yet, Zhang Taiyan perceived the American system as overly centralized. Max M. Edling, *Perfecting the Union: National and State Authority in the US Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Bradford R. Clark, “Constitutional Compromise and the Supremacy Clause,” *The Notre Dame Law Review* 83.4 (2008), 1421–39.

Competition for the presidency resulted in civil wars and warlordism, while corruption originating from the center of power spread through local levels. The only solution lay in stripping the central government of all its power, including its control over military and diplomatic affairs. While calling for the devolution of power to the provinces, Zhang Taiyan expressed his confidence that provincial authorities, compared to central government officials, would prioritize provincial interests and would be more capable of defending their province from both foreign intruders and internal threats. Such federal self-government, asserted Zhang, “has never been seen in other countries and is especially viable for China.”³⁴

Unlike Kang Youwei or Liang Qichao, Zhang Taiyan had never been a strong advocate of Western parliamentary democracy. For him, a Western-style parliament would help little to sustain either a successful constitutional monarchy, as expected by reformers, or a democratic republic, as desired by revolutionaries.³⁵ In his article “For or against a Parliamentary System” published in 1908, he explained why the to-be-established republic should adopt the presidency but not parliamentary politics. The power of a president, argued Zhang, could be defined and limited by dividing executive, legislative, and judicial responsibilities, but parliamentarians would form a new privileged class and become despots caring about nothing but the interests of their political parties, thus impeding, instead of facilitating, communication between the president and local people. He went so far as to argue that, for a country as vast and populous as China, transitioning into a parliamentary democracy would be more detrimental than remaining an autocracy, as the latter would only have one despot.³⁶ In 1922, while promoting “a big reform” (*da gaige* 大改革) toward federal self-government, Zhang Taiyan took his stance even further. Not only did he reiterate his aversion to parliamentary politics, but he also launched a polemic against the presidency. The presidency, parliament, and national constitution were now identified by him as the three “menaces” behind the centralization of power and the perpetuation of civil wars.³⁷ The Chinese federation he proposed would not have a substantial parliament with political parties. Instead, it would feature a simple and strictly limited federal assembly (*liansheng canyiyuan* 聯省參議院), comprising around one hundred assemblymen directly elected from among provincial residents with no more than five from each province. Instead of a president, there would be an executive committee consisting of five to seven members. And in place of a national constitution, there would be a federal constitution, strictly contingent upon the promulgation of provincial constitutions.³⁸ Clearly, with such a federal self-government in mind, Zhang Taiyan aimed to depart from Western-style parliamentary government, which he deemed centralist and statist in nature.

Does this mean that Zhang Taiyan based his federal self-government on an anarchist ideal? Indeed, during his stay in Japan between 1906 and 1911, he became close to Tokyo anarchists such as Liu Shipai 劉師培 and Zhang Ji 張繼. However, as scholars

³⁴Zhang, “Liansheng zizhi xuzhi zhengfu yi,” 7.

³⁵Marbel Lee, “Zhang Taiyan: Daoist Individualism and Political Reality,” *Frontiers of Literary Studies of China* 7.3 (2013), 353, 361.

³⁶Zhang Taiyan, “Daiyi ran fou lun” 代議然否論, in *Zhang Taiyan quanji* 4, 306–11.

³⁷“Zhang Taiyan gaige fazhi zhi xinzhuzhang” 章太炎改革法製之新主張, *Shenbao* 申報, June 25, 1922, 13; Zhang Taiyan, “Miluan zai qu sandu shuo” 弭亂在去三蠹說, in *Zhang Taiyan zhenglun xuanji* 章太炎政論選集, edited by Tang Zhijun 湯誌鈞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 756–59.

³⁸“Zhang Taiyan gaige fazhi zhi xinzhuzhang,” 13; Zhang Taiyan, “Gaige yijian shu” 改革意見書, in *Zhang Taiyan zhenglun xuanji*, 801.

have cogently argued, Zhang differentiated himself from the anarchists on evolution. While anarchists adopted the Hegelian view of progress and thus regarded anarchy as the highest stage of human evolution, where people would finally become equal, Zhang negated the idea of social evolution as linear progress.³⁹ For Zhang, evolution was simply change, something inevitable but without any underlying principle, purpose, or progress.⁴⁰ Therefore, while “equality” was a concept no less central to his political thought than to the anarchists, he abstained from searching for equality at the endpoint of history. Instead, he believed that to understand and realize equality one needs to return to the beginning.

In 1910, Zhang Taiyan wrote *A Commentary on the Theory of Equalization* to discuss the essence of equality in Daoist terms. Focusing on Zhuang Zi’s 莊子 idea of “achieving equality by allowing difference” (*buqi er qi* 不齊而齊), Zhang noted that the key to equality lay in nothing but “treating things in accordance with what they are.”⁴¹ Believing that it was the constructed categories, value-imbued concepts, and politically motivated discourses that prevented people from doing so, Zhang argued: “It is only when one is detached from speech, detached from words and detached from the mind taking objects as its causal conditions, that one understands absolute equality.”⁴² His Daoist inquiry into equality was reinforced by his profound contemplation of self-consciousness along the lines of Yogācāra Buddhism (the consciousness-only school of Mahayana Buddhism). He perceived human evolution as a process of self-realization, involving the construction of categories, the naming of names, and the creation of “us,” “other,” “group,” “state,” and “universe.” Believing that this process would enlarge human will and yield both good and bad results, he claimed that evolution entailed no progress and that the end of evolution might indeed be the opposite of equality.⁴³ Only by returning to Ālaya consciousness—a rudimentary consciousness from which self-consciousness evolves or a “pre-originary” stage where no distinction exists between us and other—could true equality be attained.⁴⁴ As Viren Murthy puts it, instead of advocating self-realization, Zhang Taiyan emphasized self-negation and viewed the end of history as the negation of history.⁴⁵ In this regard, for Zhang, reaching the endpoint of history meant nothing but a return to the beginning and to the pre-originality. Through this “return,” one would rid himself not only of the constructed boundaries (namely universe, state, group, and

³⁹Lin, *Dingge yiwen*, 260–61; Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan*, 185–91. For a detailed discussion of Zhang Taiyan’s polemic against Hegelian progressivism, see Viren Murthy, “Transfiguring Modern Temporality: Zhang Taiyan’s Yogacara Critique of Evolutionary History,” *Modern China* 38.5 (2012), 483–522.

⁴⁰Murthy, “Transfiguring Modern Temporality,” 505; Charlotte Furth, “The Sage as Rebel: The Inner World of Chang Ping-lin,” in *The Limits of Change*, 137.

⁴¹Lin Ma, “Taking Zhang Taiyan into Multiculturalism: What about Achieving Equality by Leaving Things Uneven (Buqi Er Qi)?” *Dao* 16.1 (2017), 78.

⁴²Zhang Taiyan, “Qiwulun shi dingben” 齊物論釋定本, in *Zhongguo xiandai xueshu jingdian: Zhang Taiyan juan* 中國現代學術經典: 章太炎卷, edited by Liu Mengxi 劉夢溪 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 409. The English translation of this passage is cited in Ma, “Taking Zhang Taiyan into Multiculturalism,” 78, and in Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan*, 210.

⁴³Zhang Taiyan, “Wu wu lun” 五無論, in *Zhang Taiyan quanji* 4, 429–43; Zhang Taiyan, “Jufen jinhuailun” 俱分進化論, in *Zhang Taiyan quanji* 4, 386–90.

⁴⁴Zhang, “Jufen jinhuailun,” 389; Murthy, “Transfiguring Modern Temporality,” 499; Ma, “Taking Zhang Taiyan into Multiculturalism,” 78.

⁴⁵Murthy, “Transfiguring Modern Temporality,” 514.

eventually us/other) but also of the constructed axiom (*gongli* 公理) of evolution, thus moving closer to equality.⁴⁶

Scholars agree that the years between 1906 and 1911 marked a turning point in Zhang Taiyan's political thought, attributed to his growing interest in Daoism and Buddhism.⁴⁷ Inspired by Daoist and Buddhist principles, Zhang not only questioned the discourses of evolution, civilization, and the nation-state but also their ontological and epistemological foundations. The question is, what would serve as an alternative if the entire philosophy and institution of Western modernity were to be negated? In other words, what would be the externalized entity of *Ālaya* consciousness or the Daoist notion of equality? Murthy maintains that Zhang Taiyan "rarely discusses the details of a political or cultural system of equalization."⁴⁸ While it might be true that before 1911 Zhang had not yet outlined an alternative, the same cannot be said about his ideological advancements in the 1910s and 1920s. I argue that it was based on the Daoist notion of equality that Zhang Taiyan conceived and promoted his federal self-government. What he desired was not a modern Western system but a pre-originary organism of self-government, seen as a solution to the predicaments of Western modernity, notably the consecration of the nation-state and the concentration of power. Although the federal system that he outlined in 1920 was not exactly a pre-originary anarchy, as it still required the promulgation of provincial constitutions and the formation of a federal assembly, he nonetheless stressed "true self-government" as a prerequisite for a Chinese federation.⁴⁹ In his telegram sent to various provincial self-government associations, he stated:

We'd rather have no government at the national level than have no self-government at the local level. [In terms of self-government] we must embrace our own native society while leaving other groups in peace. And we must let sages lead while allowing ordinary people to use their talents.⁵⁰

This passage seems to allude to the ideal of village self-rule, yet Zhang Taiyan did not intend to associate his federal self-government with any specific Chinese tradition, including that of *fengjian*. His ideological trajectory concerning *fengjian* was intricate: In 1899, influenced by Huang Zongxi's ideas on *fengjian*, he advocated the restoration of *fanzhen* 藩鎮—frontier polities established outside of the metropolitan region—to both cultivate local self-government and defend China from foreign invaders. He soon abandoned this notion of *fengjian* to embrace nationalism and centralism as he transitioned from being a reformist to a revolutionary at the turn of the century.⁵¹ Despite his growing attraction to federalism after 1911, he did not revisit his earlier ideas on *fengjian*. This reluctance might have been caused, as Duara suggests, by the

⁴⁶Zhang Taiyan, "Si huo lun" 四惑論, in *Zhang Taiyan quanji* 4, 444–52.

⁴⁷Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan*, 90, 169–70; Wang, *Zhang Taiyan de sixiang jiqi dui ruxue chuantong de dongji*, 109.

⁴⁸Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan*, 217.

⁴⁹"Zhang Taiyan yu geshengqu zizhi lianhehui dian" 章太炎與各省區自治聯合會電, *Shenbao*, January 6, 1921, 10; "Zhang Taiyan duiyu Zhejiang shengxian zhi yijian" 章太炎對於浙江省憲之意見, *Shenbao*, June 14, 1921, 10.

⁵⁰"Zhang Taiyan yu geshengqu zizhi lianhehui dian," 10.

⁵¹Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 180–81; Wang Yuhua 王玉華, "Zhang Taiyan difang zhengzhi sixiang lun" 章太炎地方政治思想論, *Lishi dang'an* no. 2 (1999), 108.

derogatory connotations of *fengjian* in the New Culture and May Fourth period.⁵² But Zhang Taiyan no longer needed *fengjian*, as he now based his federalist blueprint on a different worldview. In 1908, he criticized the reformers' use of the *fengjian* tradition to justify China's adoption of Western parliamentary democracy.⁵³ His concern was not only *fengjian*'s anachronism but also the utilization of China's past to pave the way for submission to Western political modernity.⁵⁴ By advocating federal self-government, Zhang now aimed not to invoke a Chinese past to facilitate China's progression toward a higher historical stage, but rather to break away from Western modernity and return to the Daoist status of beginning.

For Zhang Taiyan, the legitimacy of his federal self-government rested primarily on the Daoist notion of equality, namely, achieving equality by allowing difference. Shortly after the 1911 Revolution, he had already asserted that "to achieve unification, we must understand difference ... understanding the diverse customs and habits of people while allowing their spontaneous development is more important than establishing a single overarching law."⁵⁵ In 1923, during the peak of the federalist movement, he penned a preface to the Chinese translation of James Bryce's book *Modern Democracies*. Although four of the six modern democracies surveyed in Bryce's work were federations (Switzerland, the US, Canada, and Australia), Zhang remained unconvinced that parliamentarianism embodied in these democracies aligned with his federalist vision. Not only did he reiterate the shortcomings of parliamentary government, but he also questioned Swiss-style direct democracy. In his eyes, granting people the rights to initiative, referendum, and recall could scarcely rectify the flaws of parliamentarism; instead, it would "impose equalization on people (*qimin* 齊民) through executive and legislative procedures." And such "equalization" would only harm a large, populous country with "unequal morals and varied local customs."⁵⁶ This assertion was consistent with his Daoist interpretation of equality: "To equalize the unequal is the common fixation of the ordinary; to achieve equality by allowing difference is the ideal discourse of the philosopher."⁵⁷ If achieving equality philosophically entailed negating self-realization and seeing things in accordance with what they are, then as a political practice, it necessitated letting natives govern themselves without equalizing others and fully representing local and provincial differences at a federal assembly. Thus, through promulgating federal self-government, Zhang Taiyan aimed to foster equality philosophically as well as politically.

For Zhang Taiyan, federal self-government was not solely a philosophical concept; it also encompassed concrete political activities and actions. Between 1920 and 1926, he sent numerous telegrams to military leaders in southern provinces, urging them to defend provincial self-government and refuse collaboration with any centralist forces.⁵⁸

⁵²Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 177.

⁵³Late-Qing reformers, starting with Wei Yuan 魏源, believed that the Duke of Zhou established the dynasty's legitimacy by consulting eminent scholars across the empire. They argued that the Zhou, as China's last feudal dynasty, favored debate and thus witnessed the "sprouts of parliamentarianism." Kuhn, "Ideas behind China's Modern State," 308; Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 154.

⁵⁴Zhang, "Daiyi ran fou lun," 300.

⁵⁵Zhang Taiyan, "Xianzonghe houtongyi lun" 先綜合後統一論, in *Zhang Taiyan zhenglun xuanji*, 551–52.

⁵⁶Zhang Taiyan, "Xu" 序, in James Bryce, *Xiandai minzhu zhengzhi* 現代民主政治, translated by Yang Yongtai 楊永泰 (Shanghai: Taidong tushuju, 1924), 1–2.

⁵⁷Zhang, "Qiwulun shi dingben," 407.

⁵⁸*Zhang Taiyan nianpu changbian* 章太炎年譜長編, edited by Tang Zhijun 湯誌鈞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1979), 598–883.

He criticized the two existing parliaments: the Old Parliament (*Jiuguohui* 舊國會), resumed in Beijing in 1922 under the Beiyang powers, and the Extraordinary Parliament (*Feichang guohui* 非常國會), convened in Guangzhou in 1921 by Kuomintang revolutionaries.⁵⁹ He opposed Li Yuanhong's 黎元洪 assumption of the presidency resulting from the restoration of the Old Parliament, as well as Sun Yat-sen's election by the Extraordinary Parliament to be the Extraordinary President.⁶⁰ While standing firmly against "parliament" and "presidency," Zhang Taiyan devoted most of his time to the promulgation of provincial constitutions and a federal constitution. On the one hand, by networking among legislative scholars sojourning in Shanghai (including Wang Zhengting 王正廷, Tang Dechang 唐德昌, and Li Jiannong 李劍農), he supervised the promulgation of provincial constitutions in the provinces of Zhejiang, Hunan, and Guangdong.⁶¹ On the other hand, he served as a special advisor for the National Affairs Conference (*Guoshi huiyi* 國是會議) in 1922, where he established the guiding principles for the promulgation of a federal constitution.⁶²

Zhang Taiyan was certainly not alone in promoting federal self-government. As a Zhejiang native, he worked closely with Zhu Fucheng 褚輔成, a Zhejiangese elite man, in leading the Association for the Promotion of Federal Self-Government (*Liansheng zizhi cujinhui* 聯省自治促進會), which gathered supporters from various provinces and remained active until at least 1924.⁶³ Zhang's most heartfelt supporters, interestingly, were not from his home province, but rather from the two southern provinces of Hunan and Guangdong. As the following sections will show, while Zhang Taiyan refrained from associating federal self-government with *fengjian*, his followers largely embraced federalism as a system compatible with the Chinese cultural and political tradition of village self-rule.

The Village, *Tiaohe*, Guild Socialism, and Federal Group Self-Government

In 1916, Yuan Shikai died, and Zhang Taiyan was released after three years of house arrest. Zhang's house arrest had been ordered by Yuan. Yuan's dictatorship and, certainly, the house arrest, prompted Zhang to reconsider the nationalist and centralist views that he had upheld during the revolutionary period. Back in 1908, he had dismissed "any attempt to divide the nation into federal states," and proclaimed that "our current task is to consolidate the nation, unify languages, and harmonize customs."⁶⁴ However, he concurrently argued that a centralized, unified nation-state was only necessary for weak countries like China to defend themselves and should be discarded as soon as possible.⁶⁵ How soon, then? In 1916, Zhang Taiyan believed that it was the right time to renounce "state" and "nationalism," despite China still being a

⁵⁹"Zhang Taiyan gaige fazhi zhi xinzhuzhang," 13.

⁶⁰"Zhang Taiyan fu Cao Kun Wu Peifu dian" 章太炎復曹錕吳佩孚電, *Shenbao*, May 29, 1922, 13; "Zhang Taiyan zhi jieyi shu" 章太炎之解疑書, *Shenbao*, June 28, 1922, 13.

⁶¹Guo, *Negotiating a Chinese Federation*, 135–36.

⁶²"Zhang Taiyan zai Guoshi huiyi zhi fengtou" 章太炎在國是會議之風頭, *Minguo ribao* 民國日報, June 29, 1922, 10; "Guoshi huiyi guoxian yanjiang ji" 國是會議國憲演講記, in *Zhang Taiyan nianpu changbian*, 658–61.

⁶³"Liansheng zizhi cujinhui zhi faqi" 聯省自治促進會之發起, *Minguo ribao*, July 23, 1922, 10; "Liansheng zhi choubenhui ji" 聯治社籌備會記, *Shenbao*, July 29, 1924, unknown page.

⁶⁴Zhang, "Daiyi ran fou lun," 305.

⁶⁵Zhang Taiyan, "Guojia lun" 國家論, in *Zhang Taiyan quanji* 4, 462–65.

weak country. Upon his release, he met with Zhang Shizhao, his sworn brother twelve years his junior, who had rigorously theorized and propagated federalism.⁶⁶

Between 1914 and 1915, Zhang Shizhao made his magazine *The Tiger* (*Jiayin* 甲寅) a frontier forum for discussing federalism, as a response to Yuan Shikai's dictatorship and the growing centralist rhetoric in China after the revolution.⁶⁷ In his extensive essay titled "An Academic Theory of Federalism," Zhang delved into the structures of existing federations (such as the US and Brazil) and potential ones (such as France and the British Empire) to make federalism comprehensible to his Chinese audience.⁶⁸ His arguments were threefold: Firstly, while a federation could be composed of independent states, it could also evolve from a unitary state, as seen in Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia. Secondly, regarding state-building, there existed no fixed, linear progression from a confederation to a federation and then to a unitary state. A federal system, characterized by *tiaohe* 調和 (dynamic accommodation) between confederation and unitary state, could be adopted by any country under the right conditions. Lastly, the key to realizing a federation was not revolution but "public opinion" (*yulun* 輿論).⁶⁹ Clearly, this theorization of federalism aimed to lay the groundwork for China, at the time a "unitary state" under Yuan Shikai, to adopt a federal system in a peaceful manner.⁷⁰

Having studied in Britain for five years between 1908 and 1912, Zhang Shizhao held great admiration for the British political tradition. He opposed Jacobin-style revolutions as vehemently as monarchical despotism, advocating *tiaohe* among all prevailing political forces, interests, and emotions.⁷¹ To him, the British parliament epitomized the spirit of *tiaohe* as it maintained a balance of power between the monarch, nobility, and people within the central state. And a federation, as a polity capable of harmonizing elements from both a loosely knit confederation and a centralized state, would serve as an extension of the parliament to accommodate the thriving energy generated by local talents and the homogenizing projects and institutions at the center.⁷² The concept of *tiaohe* and the idea of "self-use of talent" thus were intertwined, forming Zhang Shizhao's federalist pursuit: "We must seek a chance to stimulate the talents of people across the country, accommodate their diverse interests and emotions, and allow this

⁶⁶Zhang Taiyan *nianpu changbian*, 187; 525–40.

⁶⁷Yuan, as the Viceroy of Zhili in the last years of the Qing and later the president of the Republic, played a pivotal role in penetrating local societies with state power. In 1914, he further ordered the disbandment of provincial legislative assemblies.

⁶⁸Zhang referred to the Girondins who revolted from the provinces against the dictatorship of the Montagnards in Paris as French federalists and the promoters of a British imperial federation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as British federalists.

⁶⁹Zhang Shizhao, "Xueli shang zhi lianbang lun" 學理上之聯邦論, *The Tiger* 甲寅 1.5 (1915), 1–21. Here I borrowed Jenco's interpretation of *tiaohe* as "accommodation." Jenco, *Making the Political Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao*, 193.

⁷⁰It is worth adding that during this period, federalists paid acute attention to distinguishing between the sovereign state (*guojia* 國家) and the state (*bang* 邦) as a self-governing entity within a federation. Zhang Shizhao and Dai Jitao 戴季陶 both pointed out that the latter, despite enjoying a high degree of autonomy, was not to be confused with the former. These arguments facilitated the propagation of the term *liansheng* 聯省 (united provinces) instead of *lianbang* 聯邦 (united states) in China, serving as a precaution against equating federalism with separatism. Zhang, "Xueli shang zhi lianbang lun," 18; Dai Jitao, "Zhonghua minguo yu lianbang zuzhi" 中華民國與聯邦組織 and "Da wen" 答問 in *Dai Jitao ji* 戴季陶集, edited by Zhang Kaiyuan 章開沅 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1990), 754–55, 794.

⁷¹Zhang Shizhao, "Tiaohe liguo lun shang" 調和立國論上, *The Tiger* 1.4 (1914), 1–28.

⁷²Zhang, "Tiaohe liguo lun shang," 7–8; Jenco, *Making the Political Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao*, 134.

process of [dynamic accommodation] to evolve into a constitution and our political tradition.”⁷³ Believing that the centralist ideas prevalent in public opinion were responsible for China’s missed opportunity to become a federation in 1911, Zhang urged the public to fully discuss, embrace, and nurture federalism.⁷⁴

With regard to how to crystallize federalism into a political system in China, Zhang Shizhao’s ideas appear somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, he regarded parliament as the only legitimate and suitable institution for facilitating peaceful political transformation. When discussing the potential British federation, he referenced James Bryce to suggest that the transformation of the British Empire into a federation would essentially entail a legislative reform achieved through establishing a decentralized federal parliament at the top (replacing the almighty Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland) and colonial/regional parliaments at the bottom.⁷⁵ However, on the other hand, as highlighted by Leigh Jenco, he emphasized the *cultivation* of local talents (the neo-Confucian notion of self-rule) in lieu of their *institutionalization* through political means (the Western principle of rule of law), thereby placing local dynamics in opposition to institutions.⁷⁶ Zhang Dongsun, an enthusiastic contributor to *The Tiger* and a proponent of federalism, was much less dubious on this matter. He underlined “self-government” and “separation of powers” as the two pillars of federalism and believed that their achievement would not be possible without parliamentary democracy. Asserting the harmony between parliamentary government and a federal system, he proposed that China follow Canada’s example in delineating provincial legislative and administrative regulations while adopting Australia’s model in establishing a bicameral parliamentary system.⁷⁷

Different from Zhang Taiyan’s philosophical and political stance, the federalism promoted by *The Tiger* largely endorsed the institutions of parliamentary democracy and aligned with the liberalist principles of Western political modernity. This divergence did not stop Zhang Taiyan from strengthening his bond with Zhang Shizhao in 1916, however. He urged his sworn brother to resume *The Tiger*, which had halted publication a year earlier. More importantly, he reminded him of *The Tiger*’s federalist mission:

When Xingyan [Zhang Shizhao’s courtesy name] launched *The Tiger*, he made splendid efforts to promote federalism. However, at that time, the dictatorship [of Yuan Shikai] was at its peak, and everyone suffered from it. How could a federal system be established without toppling Yuan first? Now times are different, and circumstances have changed. Federalism should be pursued without hesitation as we face fewer difficulties. I hope that Xingyan has not forgotten what he said [in *The Tiger*].⁷⁸

Not only had Zhang Shizhao not forgotten his pursuit of federalism, but he also began to question the compatibility of parliamentary democracy and Chinese traditions.

⁷³Zhang, “Tiaohe liguo lun shang,” 28; Jenco, *Making the Political Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao*, 180.

⁷⁴Zhang, “Xueli shang zhi lianbang lun,” 18–19.

⁷⁵Zhang, “Xueli shang zhi lianbang lun,” 4–6.

⁷⁶Jenco, *Making the Political Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao*, 184–85.

⁷⁷Zhang Dongsun, “Yu zhi lianbang zuzhi lun” 予之聯邦組織論, *Rightness* 正誼 1.5 (1914), 4–9; Zhang Dongsun, “Wuren lixiang zhidu zhi lianbang” 吾人理想製度之聯邦, *The Tiger* 1.10 (1915), 1–2.

⁷⁸Zhang Taiyan *nianpu changbian*, 540.

Subsequently, he joined Zhang Taiyan in the quest for China's unique path to federalism. Between 1916 and 1919, Zhang Shizhao became disillusioned with the performance of both the Beijing and Guangzhou parliaments.⁷⁹ He decided to spend two years in Europe to "observe the post-war situation, meet distinguished scholars, engage with newly published scholarship, and examine the emerging literary, philosophical, political, and economic trends in the West."⁸⁰ This trip aggravated his existing concerns about parliamentary politics. Having witnessed the economic and political crises in post-war Europe and discussed them with Fabian socialists such as George Bernard Shaw, G. D. H. Cole, and Arthur Penty, Zhang became convinced that Western parliamentary democracy was not suitable for China.⁸¹ While in Europe, he sent a letter to Zhang Taiyan, marveling at the foresight of his sworn brother: "Before the establishment of a parliamentary system in China, you had already launched a polemic against it—a polemic that others could not launch, dared not to launch, or wanted to launch but lacked the ideological strength to do so."⁸²

If Zhang Taiyan's federalism found its ideological underpinning in the total negation of Western modernity that valorized evolution, the construction of categories, and centralization, then Zhang Shizhao's federalism was rooted in the idea of *tiaohe*, although its focus and purpose underwent significant change. When discussing it in *The Tiger* in 1914, he primarily conceived *tiaohe* as an attitude of political accommodation and reconciliation embodied in parliamentary politics.⁸³ However, toward the late 1910s, his attention shifted to the cultural and philosophical notions of *tiaohe*. In 1918, at the twentieth-anniversary celebration of Peking University, he gave a speech titled "Evolution and *tiaohe*," wherein he argued:

"Old" and "new" are of one source—labeling them "old" and "new" creates a division between them. In our conventional understanding, the "old" is the fading phenomenon while the "new" is the emerging phenomenon. When the "old" has not entirely vanished and the "new" has not fully arrived, there must be a shared space where "old" and "new" can accommodate one another ... Without this shared space, the world would not exist, and human beings would not evolve ... What is this shared space? It is the space of *tiaohe*.⁸⁴

With these notions, Zhang Shizhao's federalism was no longer intended to echo Western political modernity but to create a "shared space" where China's cultural

⁷⁹Zou, *Zhang Shizhao shehui zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu 1903–1927*, 171–77.

⁸⁰Zhang Xingyan hui Yue hou zhi tanhua" 章行嚴回粵後之談話, *Shenbao*, November 2, 1919, 7. Zhang's departure was delayed. He planned to leave in 1919, but eventually left in February 1921 and returned to China in September 1922. Zou, *Zhang Shizhao shehui zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu 1903–1927*, 203, 208.

⁸¹Zou, *Zhang Shizhao shehui zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu 1903–1927*, 203–8.

⁸²Zhang Shizhao, "Daiyi fei yi an" 代議非易案, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku: Zhang Shizhao juan* 中國近代思想家文庫: 章士釗卷, edited by Guo Shuanglin 郭雙林 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2015), 549.

⁸³Although Jenco argues that by *tiaohe* Zhang Shizhao meant a kind of constant accommodation of differences that engaged everyone and everyday life, Zhang's articles published in *The Tiger* nonetheless concentrated on issues of political reformation. See Jenco, *Making the Political Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao*, 193–223.

⁸⁴Zhang jiaoshou Shizhao zhi yanshuoci" 章教授士釗之演說詞, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 476.

and political traditions could “*tiaohe*” the emerging exigencies of state-building. And for Zhang, this *tiaohe* signified the dynamic of evolution. It is thus no surprise that, upon his return from war-torn Europe to his home province Hunan, a province known for its agricultural prosperity and civilization, he became convinced that the space of *tiaohe* was not to be found within the Western parliament, but within the Chinese village.

From 1921 onward, Zhang Shizhao published a series of articles to advocate a novel approach to political reform: “state-building based on agriculture” (*yinong liguo* 以農立國). For Zhang, China as an agricultural civilization was fundamentally different from the West, where industrial civilization thrived. Economically, China upheld self-sufficiency, self-restraint, and frugality, whilst industrial nations pursued expansion and exploitation, favoring capital concentration and ostentatious urban construction. Culturally, China valorized familial bonds and communal support over individual competition, and ritual over self-interest.⁸⁵ In Zhang’s eyes, the Western parliamentary system, now representing capitalist interests and featuring interparty competition, was more of a curse than a blessing for China. Unlike Western politicians whose positions and authority relied on the *capital* that they possessed, Chinese parliamentarians, lacking capitalist backgrounds themselves, had to resort to cheating, embezzlement, and bribery to secure elections and maintain their extravagant political activities. What China truly needed, asserted Zhang, was not parliamentary politics but self-government spanning from village to province.⁸⁶

Celebrating the idea of “self-government in industry” promoted by the guild socialists he met in Europe, Zhang Shizhao now called for self-representation among all professional groups—with peasants being the largest group—and envisioned a system termed “federal group self-government” (*lianye zizhi* 聯業自治).⁸⁷ Like guild socialists, he made it clear that his federal group self-government stood distinct from the Soviet approaches seen in the USSR, which were deemed centralist and statist in nature, subordinating production to politics and professional groups to the party-state.⁸⁸ His federal group self-government, on the other hand, resonated with Zhang Taiyan’s federal (province) self-government. “I dare to say,” stated Zhang Shizhao in 1925, “the key to state-building today lies in devolution; the more devolutionary a political system, the more progress it achieves in state-building. Federalists call for the devolution [of power] to the provinces, while I call for the devolution [of power] to professional groups.”⁸⁹

It is worth noting that Zhang Shizhao’s renewed plan exhibited distinctive characteristics in comparison to guild socialism. Above all, whereas “self-government in industry” implied an industrialized society as a prerequisite, Zhang’s proposal was deeply concerned with Chinese rural society and its traditions. According to Zhang, industrialization in the West led to the emergence of capitalists and industrial workers. The

⁸⁵“Zhang Xingyan yanjiang ouyou zhi ganxiang zhuzhang nongye liguo zhi zhi” 章行嚴演講歐遊之感想主張農業立國之製, *Shenbao*, January 23, 1923, 13; Zhang Shizhao, “Nongguo bian” 農國辯, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 535–36.

⁸⁶Zhang Shizhao, “Daiyizhi heyi bu shihe yu Zhongguo” 代議製何以不適合於中國, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 499–500; “Zhang Xingyan yanjiang ouyou zhi ganxiang zhuzhang nongye liguo zhi zhi,” 13.

⁸⁷Zhang Shizhao, “Yezhi yu nong” 業治與農, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 514.

⁸⁸Zhang Shizhao, “Lun yezhi” 論業治, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 638–39; Rainer Eisfeld, “The Emergence and Meaning of Socialist Pluralism,” *International Political Science Review* 17.3 (1996), 267–79.

⁸⁹Zhang Shizhao, “Shuo fen” 說分, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 567.

former, thanks to their capital, held significant representation in parliamentary politics, while the latter were now seeking their own political representation through industrial self-government. However, China, being a country with neither big capitalists nor a substantial number of industrial workers, must begin its political reform through rural organization.⁹⁰ Furthermore, in contrast to G. D. H. Cole's version of a dual system comprising two "supreme bodies"—a territorial parliament representing the "consumers" and a vocational guild congress representing the "producers"—Zhang Shizhao went much further in repudiating Western parliamentary politics. He reproached politicians and parliamentarians for producing nothing for the world and suggested that only "producers" had the right to political representation and sovereignty.⁹¹ This is to say, Zhang expected his federal group self-government to supersede, rather than coexist with, parliamentary government.

After dismissing Western-style parliamentary politics, Zhang Shizhao confronted a similar dilemma as his sworn brother Zhang Taiyan: What institutions should replace the presidency, parliament, and national constitution—the trio dubbed as the "menaces"—to realize a Chinese federation? As previously discussed, the elder Zhang proposed an executive committee, a limited federal assembly, and the grassroots adoption of provincial constitutions. The younger Zhang, despite having embraced parliamentary democracy more fervently than his sworn brother, now advocated a more radical departure from it. He contended that if a president tended to become a dictator, there was no guarantee that an executive committee would yield five or seven sages.⁹² Elections could hardly make things better, given that neither Chinese voters nor candidates had the requisite tradition, education, or competence to make elections work.⁹³ Calling for the replacement of parliaments and political parties with group self-government and the substitution of elections with examinations, Zhang emphasized the need to cultivate and select local talents in a "non-Western" manner.⁹⁴ At the provincial level, he championed absolute provincial self-government regarding military, legislative, and political affairs, despite ongoing conflict and chaos: "[We must] allow provincial residents, civil bureaucrats, and military strongmen to contend among themselves until these struggles result in a solid foundation for provincial self-government."⁹⁵ At the national level, like Zhang Taiyan, he believed that the central government must be completely "void." However, instead of suggesting an executive committee, he recommended appointing a "parasitic president" (*jisheng yuanshou* 寄生元首) whose presidency would be symbolic and whose political power would be minimal. The principal of Peking University, in his view, could serve as an ideal candidate for this role, supposedly during their leisure time.⁹⁶ Having identified "parasitic president," "group self-government," and "examination" as the three pillars of his federal group self-government, Zhang Shizhao stressed the *village* as the basis of Chinese state-building: "All political affairs and social virtues rely on rural life and rural civilization."⁹⁷

⁹⁰Zhang, "Yezhi yu nong," 511–15; Zhang, "Lun yezhi," 636–39.

⁹¹Eisfeld, "The Emergence and Meaning of Socialist Pluralism," 272–73; Zhang Shizhao, "Yezhi lun" 業治論, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 508–10.

⁹²Zhang Shizhao, "Wushou bian da Xu Fosu" 無首辯答徐佛蘇, *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 506.

⁹³Zhang Shizhao, "Xin sichao yu tiaohu" 新思潮與調和, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 486–87; Zhang Shizhao, "Zailun feidang" 再論非黨, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 530.

⁹⁴Zhang, "Zailun feidang," 530–31.

⁹⁵Zhang Shizhao, "Zaobang" 造邦, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 497.

⁹⁶Zhang Shizhao, "Yuanshou jisheng lun" 元首寄生論, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku*, 523.

⁹⁷Zhang, "Zailun feidang," 531.

Zhang Shizhao was not the only intellectual who made a sharp turn in the immediate aftermath of the Great War regarding China's adoption of Western political principles and institutions. Zhang Dongsun, a former comrade of Zhang Shizhao advocating federalism in *The Tiger* in the 1910s, also became a proponent of federal group self-government in the 1920s. Although he frowned upon the conservative tone of *tiaohe* and maintained that industrialization was pivotal for China's survival, he nonetheless expected group self-government to stimulate China's socio-political transformation in a non-statist, pluralistic manner.⁹⁸ And Liang Qichao, once a vociferous advocate of Western political modernity—ranging from social Darwinism to constitutionalism and to the ideology of the nation-state—also experienced a significant ideological shift after returning from his European trip. His revised approach largely mirrored Zhang Shizhao's perspective. It criticized the centralism inherent in Western political and economic systems while underscoring Chinese traditions—especially family farming and village life—as the bedrock of China's future reform.⁹⁹ Liang revisited the idea of local self-government that he had advocated during the late-Qing period but discarded the statist inclination of his earlier thought. “Our dream for a centralized state is futile, because we have forgotten that centralism contradicts the longstanding Chinese national tradition,” he now asserted.¹⁰⁰ It is thus no surprise that, *La Rekonstrue* (*Gaizao* 改造), a magazine co-founded by Zhang Dongsun and Liang Qichao, proclaimed in 1920 that political representation in China should not be pursued through parliamentary politics but rather through a blend of group self-government and local self-government.¹⁰¹

Both Zhang Shizhao and Liang Qichao contributed to Hunan's provincial self-government and the promulgation of the Hunan Provincial Constitution (*Hunansheng xianfa* 湖南省憲法). In 1920, Liang Qichao lent his assistance to Xiong Xiling 熊希齡, a prominent Hunanese politician and scholar, in drafting the “Basic Law of Hunan Provincial Self-Government” (*Hunansheng zizhi genbenfa* 湖南省自治根本法). This law laid the foundation for the eventual promulgation of the Hunan Provincial Constitution in December 1921.¹⁰² Although Zhang Shizhao was not directly involved in the promulgation of the constitution (he was in Europe at that time), his intellectual protégé Li Jiannong, also a Hunanese, served as the chief draftsman of the constitution.¹⁰³ Containing 13 chapters and 141 clauses, the Hunan

⁹⁸The idea “*tiaohe* between the old and the new” (*xinjiu tiaohe* 新舊調和) incited a debate among Chinese intellectuals between 1919 and 1920. Zhang Dongsun joined new culturalists such as Chen Duxiu in criticizing *tiaohe* and urging socio-political progression. However, like Zhang Shizhao, he pursued a pluralist position in opposition to statism and political monism. See Soonyi Lee, “A Pluralist Vision of Society in Defiance of State Power: Guild Socialism in China after the First World War,” *Modern China* 49.5 (2023), 589–620; Zou, *Zhang Shizhao shehui zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu 1903–1927*, 189–99.

⁹⁹“Liang Rengong zai Zhongguo gongxue yanshuo” 梁任公在中國公學演說, *Shenbao*, March 14, 1920, 10; “Liang Rengong zai Zhongguo gongxue yanshuo 2” 梁任公在中國公學演說 2, *Shenbao*, March 15, 1920, 10.

¹⁰⁰“Liang Rengong zai Zhongguo gongxue yanshuo 2,” 10.

¹⁰¹Liang Qichao, “*Gaizao fakanci*” 改造發刊詞, *La Rekonstrue* 改造 3.1 (1920), 5–7.

¹⁰²Guo, *Negotiating a Chinese Federation*, 73–75.

¹⁰³Long Jiannong 龍兼公, “Hunan zizhi jilue” 湖南自治記略, *Dagongbao*, September 1, 1921, 10–11. Li Jiannong largely echoed Zhang Shizhao's federalist ideas from the *Tiger* period, but he displayed a more pragmatic approach than Zhang regarding the potential use of existing parliaments for the promulgation of a federal constitution. For more information on Li Jiannong's ideas, see Chen Youliang 陳友良, *Minchu liuying xueren: cong Jiayin dao Taipingyang de zhenglun yanjiu* 民初留英學人：從甲寅到太平洋的爭論研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2013), 205–31.

Provincial Constitution reflected several critical principles proposed by Chinese federalists. In line with Zhang Taiyan's proposal of self-government, the constitution pronounced in its general outline that the right to provincial self-government was exclusive to the province's inhabitants. Furthermore, chapter seven, dedicated to executive matters, stipulated that the Provincial Council (*Shengwuyuan* 省務院) held executive responsibilities for provincial military affairs and that the provincial army was answerable to the central government solely in the event of China declaring war on a foreign country. Addressing legislation in chapter six, the constitution affirmed that all professional groups, including peasant associations, possessed the right to propose bills and that the provincial legislative assembly had the obligation to second their bills.¹⁰⁴

Upon his return from Europe in October 1922, Zhang Shizhao met with Zhao Hengti, the influential provincial military strongman, in Changsha. At that time, Zhao had earned a political reputation as an earnest supporter of federal self-government and a ruthless defender of Hunan's provincial autonomy. He had been recently elected as the Governor of Hunan through popular vote.¹⁰⁵ Zhang must have been impressed by Zhao's commitment to federalism for he drafted Zhao's inaugural speech and agreed to assist him in implementing Hunan's provincial self-government.¹⁰⁶ Zhao immediately invited Zhang to join the newly established Provincial Council, but Zhang refused. According to *Shenbao*, Zhang Shizhao did not return to his home province to become a politician or assemblyman. Instead, he was determined, as an ordinary Hunanese, to go to the peasants and initiate group self-government as the first step toward federalism.¹⁰⁷

The Village, Anarchism, and "United Provinces of China"

The spirit of "going to the peasants" and the profound ardor for village life as a cultural, economic, and political counterpoint to Western modernity, evident in Zhang Shizhao's ideas during the 1920s, could hardly be considered original at the global level. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Russian intelligentsia had already thoroughly engaged themselves with the concept of the *village*, promoting nihilism, Narodism, anarchism, and socialism. Distinguished intellectuals of that era—ranging from Tolstoy to Chernyshevsky to Bakunin—viewed the Russian *mir* or *obshchina* (rural commune) not merely as the bastion of Slavophile values embodied within "the people" and the epicenter of social revolutions, but also as a tangible and psychological milieu where intellectual elites could remold themselves through an ascetic, sacrificial life alongside "the people."¹⁰⁸ This Russian ethos left a profound imprint on Chinese intellectuals, sparking Chinese anarchist activism at the turn of the century.

¹⁰⁴"Hunansheng xianfa" 湖南省憲法, 1–28, D929.6–342/26, Republican-period Collection, National Library of China.

¹⁰⁵"Zhao Hengti wei huxian er fendou" 趙恒惕為護憲而奮鬥, in *Zhao Hengti zhuanji ziliao* 趙恒惕傳記資料, edited by Zhu Chuanyu 朱傳譽 (Taipei: Tianyi chubanshe, 1979), 51–52.

¹⁰⁶Long Guang 隆廣, "Zhang Shizhao de wenzhang" 章士釗的文章, *Minguo ribao* (*Jiangxi*) 民國日報江西版, August 11, 1946, 4.

¹⁰⁷"Changsha tongxin—Zhang Shizhao zai Xiang zhi xingdong" 長沙通信—章士釗在湘之行動, *Shenbao*, October 14, 1922, 7.

¹⁰⁸G. P. Fedotov, "The Religious Sources of Russian Populism," *The Russian Review* 1.2 (1942), 27–39; Marco P. Vianna Franco, "Ecological Utopianism in Narodnik Thought: Nikolay Chernyshevsky and the Redemption of Land," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 32.4 (2021), 24–27; Zuo Yuhe 左玉河, "Lun Xinhai geming shiqi de mincui zhuyi" 論辛亥革命時期的民粹主義, *Shilin* no. 2 (2012), 115–27.

Liu Shifu 劉師復, hailing from Guangdong Province, subscribed to nihilist and Narodnik thoughts while he was studying in Japan. He participated in anti-Manchu assassinations and the 1911 Revolution, subsequently founding two anarchist organizations around 1912: the Conscience Society (*Xinshhe* 心社) and the Huiming Society (*Huiming xueshe* 晦明學社).¹⁰⁹ Like the Narodniks, who advocated a life of simplicity and labor, Liu Shifu and his followers adhered to a strict moral code while calling for the society's complete renovation. Liu made "no drinking, no smoking, no hiring servants, no taking the rickshaw etc." the commandments of the Conscience Society. And in the preface to the *People's Voice* (*Minsheng* 民聲), the organ of the Huiming Society, he included vegetarianism among the society's fundamental principles.¹¹⁰ Also akin to the Narodniks, Liu focused on the *village* as the linchpin for a world revolution that aimed to "destroy all oppressive forces and achieve true freedom and happiness for the people."¹¹¹ Despite Liu Shifu's failed attempt to establish a rural commune featuring "cooperative living, learning, and laboring" in Guangdong, his political ideas were largely inherited by the New Village activists and rural reconstructionists from the 1920s onward.¹¹²

Chen Jiongming, a Cantonese military strongman and member of the Guangdong Provincial Assembly during the 1911 Revolution, maintained a close relationship with Liu Shifu. In 1910, he joined Liu's Chinese Assassination Corps (*Zhina anshatuan* 支那暗殺團) where he became influenced by Liu's anarchist ideas.¹¹³ After Liu's death in 1915, he played an important role in reviving Liu's ideology and resuming his anarchist network. From 1918 to 1920, while stationed with his troops in southern Fujian, Chen garnered support from Liu's anarchist disciples to implement local reforms. Together, they launched an anarcho-socialist magazine called *Fujian Star* (*Minxing* 閩星).¹¹⁴ Upon securing military dominance in Guangdong and assuming the position as Governor of Guangdong, he extended political shelter to these anarchists and endorsed the restoration of the *People's Voice* in Guangzhou, which had ceased publication five years earlier following Liu's passing.¹¹⁵ Chen Jiongming openly espoused anarchism. In the preface he wrote for the *Fujian Star*, he refuted the idea that weak nations still required the state for self-protection—the very idea Zhang Taiyan had previously supported before his shift toward federalism. Viewing nationalism as a source of exclusivism and egoism that proved detrimental to both weak and strong nations, Chen argued that nationalism was "not so useful" and called for a new "ism" to benefit the entirety of human society.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Germaine A. Hoston, *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 163–64.

¹¹⁰ Liu Shifu, "Bianji xuyan" 編輯緒言, *People's Voice* 民聲 no. 1 (1913), 1–2.

¹¹¹ Liu, "Bianji xuyan," 1.

¹¹² Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895–1949* (London: Routledge, 2006), 142; Edward S. Krebs, *Liu Shifu, Soul of Chinese Anarchism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 10. Compared to the rural reconstruction movement led by Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 and Yan Yangchu 晏陽初 in the 1930s, the New Village activism, initiated by Zhou Zuoren 周作人 in 1920 against the backdrop of the New Culture and May Fourth Movements, lasted for a shorter period and had less influence.

¹¹³ Chen, *Chen Jiongming and the Federalist Movement*, 27.

¹¹⁴ Liang Bingxian 梁冰弦, *Jiefang bielu* 解放別錄 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1968), 12–13.

¹¹⁵ "Minsheng xiaoshi" 民聲小史, *People's Voice* no. 30 (1921), 1–4.

¹¹⁶ Chen Jiongming, "Minxing fakanci" 閩星發刊詞, in *Chen Jingcun nianpu* 陳競存年譜, edited by Chen Dingyan 陳定炎 (Taipei: Li Ao chubanshe, 1995), 1009–10.

It is unsurprising that at the end of 1920, when Zhang Taiyan's federal self-government gained national attention, Chen Jiongming became a staunch follower. Zhang's advocacy for stripping the central government of its power resonated with Chen's anarchist beliefs. By early 1921, Chen Jiongming had formulated a new "ism" that amalgamated the Narodnik idea of the "village commune" and Zhang Taiyan's proposal of federal self-government:

The people of China are accustomed to self-government in their village communities and if there is to be democracy in China it will have to be evolved from these communities and their tradition of self-rule ... We are beginning with villages and organizing them into sub-districts under committee rule ... We propose to have the county magistrates and other local offices, as well as delegates to the Provincial Assembly, chosen by popular election ... We believe that if we begin the application of our ideas in Guangdong ... we can federate and bring in the others, one by one, until we have made China over into a *liansheng zhengfu* 聯省政府—a government of united provinces.¹¹⁷

While Chen Jiongming, like Zhang Taiyan and Zhang Shizhao, paid attention to the Chinese tradition of village self-rule, the cultural and philosophical underpinnings of his federalist ideas differed significantly from those of Zhang Taiyan and Zhang Shizhao.

Contrary to Zhang Shizhao's nostalgic imagination of a traditional Chinese village featuring tranquility, self-sufficiency, ethical order, and family rituals, Chen Jiongming envisioned a distinctly *new* village. Village communities would be united by the Kropotkinian spirit of "mutual aid" instead of Confucian family rituals. Villagers would rely on local-level direct elections—"democracy" as Chen called it—rather than moral order and examinations to bring about self-government. Chen's objective for village self-rule was not to initiate an alternative to the path taken by Western industrial states. Rather, it was to facilitate the development of local industries (*shiyè* 實業) while realizing a "United Provinces of China," not so different from the United States of America.¹¹⁸ Like most Chinese anarchists, Chen Jiongming condemned capitalism but welcomed modern science and technology. He celebrated Eastern civilization yet longed for a new culture.¹¹⁹ For him, a boundless new world could only be attained through a total transformation of the human mind, and a new "ism" could only be achieved through the creation of a new culture.¹²⁰ Despite mentioning village self-rule as a Chinese tradition, Chen Jiongming did not share Zhang Shizhao's inclination to romanticize or revive the past.

¹¹⁷Rodney Gilbert, "A Pilgrimage to Guangdong—An Interview with General Chen Jiongming," *South China Morning Post*, February 23, 1921, 7.

¹¹⁸Gilbert, "A Pilgrimage to Guangdong," 7, "Guangdongsheng zanzing xianzizhi tiaoli" 廣東省暫行縣自治條例, in *Chen Jingcun nianpu*, 1013–14; "Xiansheng zhuzhong shiyè" 先生注重實業, in *Chen Jingcun nianpu*, 193–94.

¹¹⁹While in his poem titled "Eastern Civilization," Chen encouraged young people to return to the countryside and embrace the spiritual civilization of the East, during his rule of Guangdong, he made relentless efforts to promote new education, industrialization, and urbanization. See Chen Jiongming, "Dongfang wenming" 東方文明, in *Chen Jiongming ji* 陳炯明集, edited by Duan Yunzhang 段雲章 and Ni Junming 倪俊明 (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 1998), 419; Chen, *Chen Jiongming and the Federalist Movement*, 126–42.

¹²⁰Chen, "Minxing fakanci," 1011; Chen Jiongming, "Minxing rikan xuanyan" 閩星日刊宣言, in *Chen Jiongming ji*, 441–45.

Meanwhile, unlike Zhang Taiyan, Chen Jiongming was an evolutionist. While Zhang Taiyan launched his polemic against the axiom of evolution (and indeed against any axiom that claimed universality in human history), Chen embraced social Darwinism so ardently that he changed his courtesy name to “Jingcun,” meaning “struggle for existence.”¹²¹ He maintained this name for the rest of his life, even though as a follower of Kropotkin, he believed in “mutual aid,” not class struggle, as the primary dynamic of social evolution. All his ideological and political efforts aimed at one ultimate goal: to drive the evolution of the world and realize “equal happiness” (*jundeng xingfu* 均等幸福) for all humanity.¹²² Village self-rule, as a way of life and a form of governance embodying “mutual aid,” was the means to achieve this end. Chen Jiongming thus represented the anarchists Zhang Taiyan criticized for adopting the Hegelian view of linear progress and positioning “equality” and “happiness” at the endpoint of history. Zhang would question the kind of evolution that Chen pursued. Because for Zhang, “mutual aid” was not intrinsic to human nature, and therefore the equalization of people through this means might lead to the opposite of equality and happiness.¹²³

As a new culturalist and evolutionist, Chen Jiongming fashioned his “United Provinces of China” after the federal system of the United States. In May 1922, he published his federalist blueprint in a document titled “The Federal Self-Government Movement.” In line with American parliamentary democracy, this blueprint proposed a bicameral system composed of an upper assembly representing the provinces and a lower assembly representing the citizens of the nation.¹²⁴ Despite emphasizing the separation of central and provincial powers, Chen did not overly prioritize provincial self-government. Contrary to Zhang Taiyan’s plan, his blueprint granted exclusive authority to the central government to administer both military and diplomatic affairs and stipulated that provincial constitutions must not contradict the federal constitution.¹²⁵

Chen Jiongming’s blueprint might have compromised Zhang Taiyan’s principle of self-government, but even Zhang himself had to make certain compromises. During the publication of “The Federal Self-Government Movement,” the National Affairs Conference proposed two different versions of a draft federal constitution. The second version, the less centralist one, was drafted under Zhang Taiyan’s auspices. This draft, akin to Chen’s blueprint, also placed military and diplomatic matters under the jurisdiction of the federal institution. However, a profound consistency between it and Zhang Taiyan’s original ideas on federal self-government is evident. According to the draft, China would establish a limited unicameral parliament (similar to the “federal assembly” proposed by Zhang) comprising around three hundred members. Each province would elect thirteen members, including five from the provincial legislative assembly, and two each from the provincial peasant association, educational association, commercial association, and workers’ association. In this sense, the parliament would solely represent the provinces rather than any political party or the nation at large.

¹²¹Winston Hsieh, “The Ideas and Ideals of a Warlord: Ch’en Chiung-ming,” *Papers on China* no. 16 (1962), 202.

¹²²Chen, “Minxing fakanci,” 1008.

¹²³Zhang, “Si huo lun,” 446–51.

¹²⁴In this document, Chen articulated that the Chinese lower assembly would represent the citizens of the nation instead of the citizens of the provinces. Conversely, the US founding fathers were vague about whether the House of Representatives represented the people of the nation or the people of the states. This suggests that, in theory, the federation conceived by Chen was more centralist than the one envisioned by the US founding fathers. Edling, *Perfecting the Union*, 40.

¹²⁵Chen Jiongming, “Liansheng zizhi yundong” 聯省自治運動, in *Chen Jiongming Ji*, 871–75.

Furthermore, China would not have a president but an executive committee with nine members, who were to be first block-voted by the parliament and then elected by provincial legislative assemblies.¹²⁶ This draft of the federal constitution, along with the fully promulgated Hunan Provincial Constitution, aimed not only to maximize the political representation and authority of the provinces but also to ensure adequate representation of diverse professional groups in legislative and executive activities at both provincial and national levels.

Between 1920 and 1922, Chen Jiongming played a crucial role in transforming the idea of federal self-government into a reality in Guangdong. In December 1920, two regulations, namely the “Guangdong Provisional Regulation on County Self-Government” (*Guangdongsheng zanxing xianzizhi tiaoli* 廣東省暫行縣自治條例) and the “Guangdong Provisional Regulation on County-Level Election” (*Guangdongsheng zanxing xianzhang xuanju tiaoli* 廣東省暫行縣長選舉條例), were enacted under his watch.¹²⁷ Four months later, over two million registered voters in Guangdong (out of a total provincial population of approximately thirty million) took part in an election for county-level magistrates. More than sixty counties (out of a total of ninety-four in Guangdong) successfully elected their own magistrates.¹²⁸ In December 1921, the Guangdong Provincial Legislative Assembly passed “The Draft for the Guangdong Provincial Constitution” (*Guangdongsheng xianfa caoan* 廣東省憲法草案).¹²⁹ And on June 16, 1922, Chen Jiongming staged a coup d’état against Sun Yat-sen, who had repudiated the prevailing federalist attempts and persisted in unifying China through a military expedition.¹³⁰

A consensus was reached among Chinese federalists in the summer of 1922. That meant that a convention for federal self-government (*liansheng huiyi* 聯省會議), presumably similar to the US Philadelphia Convention of 1787, should be convened either in Changsha or Shanghai to enable provincial representatives to coordinate and materialize their federalist plans.¹³¹ Indeed, certain military strongmen in North China, Wu Peifu 吳佩孚 in particular, remained unconvinced by the idea of federal self-government. Worse still, the coup d’état only exacerbated political and military uncertainty in the South. As of 1923, Sun Yat-sen initiated the National Revolution to annihilate uncooperative regional military strongmen such as Chen Jiongming and Zhao Hengti and to unify China by force of arms. As a result, the federalist movement gradually lost momentum. However, the movement’s ideological and political dynamism cannot be denied. In August 1922, a special column in *Shenbao* stated—conspicuously on page three—that, “federal self-government has resonated with the public and constituted a political dynamic. ... [the southern regional strongmen] dare not go against public opinion and therefore submit themselves to Zhang Taiyan’s leadership.”¹³² In

¹²⁶“Guoshi huiyi xianfa caoan (yizhong)” 國是會議憲法草案 (乙種), *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 19.21 (1922), appendix.

¹²⁷“Guangdongsheng zanxing xianzizhi tiaoli,” 1013–26; “Guangdongsheng zanxing xianzhang xuanju tiaoli” 廣東省暫行縣長選舉條例, in *Chen Jingcun nianpu*, 1027–30.

¹²⁸*Minguo Guangdong dashiji* 民國廣東大事記 (Guangzhou: Yangcheng wanbao chubanshe, 2002), 132.

¹²⁹The Draft for the Guangdong Provincial Constitution bore a significant resemblance to the Hunan Provincial Constitution, differing only in the order and specific details of a few clauses. “Guangdongsheng xianfa caoan” 廣東省憲法草案, 1–34, D921.02–342.1/3, Republican-period Collection, National Library of China.

¹³⁰*Minguo Guangdong dashiji*, 143, 155–56.

¹³¹Chen, “Liansheng zizhi yundong,” 874; “Changsha tongxin” 長沙通信, *Shenbao*, August 9, 1922, 10.

¹³²“Zhixian sheng zhong zhi liansheng zizhi” 製憲聲中之聯省自治, *Shenbao*, August 14, 1922, 3.

a letter addressed to Zhang Taiyan in the same summer, Chen Jiongming lamented the chaotic aftermath of the coup, but his confidence in federal self-government remained unwavering: “You [Zhang Taiyan] enjoy such a great reputation today that your call will be echoed by all mountains and followed by all streams—the national affairs of China will proceed according to your plan.”¹³³

Conclusion

When Zhang Taiyan and Zhang Shizhao embarked on their federalist journey, they held differing attitudes toward Western political values and institutions. The elder Zhang’s political ideas during the revolutionary period were paradoxical. On the one hand, he subscribed to nationalism to endorse a revolution and build a strong Chinese nation-state. On the other hand, he began to challenge Western modernity as a fundamental philosophical stance, which, he believed, sustained the notion of evolution, equated the process of knowledge-making with constant demarcation and categorization, and internalized oppressive, centralized means to standardize changes. Yuan Shikai’s dictatorial rule and the subsequent failure of the Chinese republic after 1911 prompted him to abandon the nationalist and centralist elements in his ideology and to seek an alternative to Western political modernity. The younger Zhang had been a staunch proponent of Western political values and institutions until the late 1910s when he shifted the focus of *tiaohe* from liberalist political reconciliation in *parliament* to cultural accommodation between the old and the new in the *village*. His earlier federalist ideas, despite emphasizing the neo-Confucian notion of “self-use of talent,” had largely echoed British parliamentarianism. However, after returning from his trip to post-war Europe, he engaged in a fresh search for an alternative to parliamentary democracy.

Although the two brothers now both promoted federalism as an alternative, their federalist thoughts and blueprints were underpinned by quite different cultural and philosophical perspectives. Upholding self-government—a bottom-up, spontaneous, and decentralized approach to managing all local and provincial affairs—Zhang Taiyan’s federal self-government aimed to rectify the centralist and statist tendencies intrinsic to Western parliamentary government on the one hand and fulfill the Daoist notion of equality on the other. For Zhang Taiyan, “equality” embodied first and foremost a *laissez-faire* attitude toward differences and deviations, an inherent aspect of human nature that had waned due to the constructed exigencies of evolution. Federal self-government, therefore, served as a suitable institution to restimulate this attitude and subsequently direct people “back” to true equality. Unlike Zhang Taiyan, who negated evolution as a “truth,” Zhang Shizhao perceived *tiaohe* between the old and the new as the very “truth” of evolution. The new federal system he conceived, namely federal group self-government, thus sought to reconcile China’s cultural and political traditions and the evolving demands of state-building. He advocated village self-rule, a combination of traditional Chinese peasant economy and Confucian family rituals and ethical order, as the basis of his federalist reform. Emphasizing the peasantry as the largest professional group in China, he was certain that self-rule among peasants and its cultural merits would easily diffuse to other professions. And by replacing elections with examinations, he hoped that the *cultivation* of local talents rather than their *institutionalization* would facilitate China’s practice of federalism. Despite the influence of guild socialism, Zhang Shizhao’s political plan for federal group self-government closely aligned with Zhang Taiyan’s idea of federal self-government: Both plans

¹³³Chen Jiongming, “Fu Zhang Taiyan dian” 復章太炎電, in *Chen Jiongming Ji*, 884–85.

repudiated the centralization of power within government, parliament, and political parties, which they believed undermined Western parliamentary democracy. Furthermore, both favored the most devolutionary—or in other words, federalist—manners of self-government, though the younger brother took it a step further by nullifying the presidency, elections, and any form of political assembly.

Among the three prominent federalist leaders, Chen Jiongming was the only one who, as Duara states, relied on modern Western discourses and theories to legitimate his movement. In contrast to Zhang Taiyan, Chen was a social Darwinist, and unlike Zhang Shizhao, he was a new culturalist. For Chen, a new culture must be invited to stimulate China's progression toward "equal happiness." Whereas Zhang Taiyan shunned the term "democracy," Chen stressed it when delineating the essence of his village self-government. And whereas both Zhang Taiyan and Zhang Shizhao eventually moved away from parliamentary politics, Chen modeled a "United Provinces of China" on the American political system. However, this does not imply that Chen Jiongming was not critical of Western modernity. Influenced by anarchist and Narodnik ideas, he also emphasized the Chinese tradition of village self-rule, which, for him, embodied the spirit of mutual aid—a crucial element he believed was absent in Western civilization. Ironically, despite his adoption of Western political concepts and institutions, his federalist project did not appear "radical" to everyone. John Dewey, a world-renowned American philosopher who conducted a lecture tour in Guangzhou in the spring of 1921, was deeply impressed by Chen Jiongming and his federalist plan. But to Dewey, the strength of Chen's plan lay not in its resemblance to the American system but rather in its compatibility with Chinese temperament, tradition, and circumstance: "Feudalism is past and gone two thousand years ago, and at no period since has China possessed a working centralized government."¹³⁴

Dewey was perhaps the only thinker who directly associated *fengjian* with the Chinese federalist movement in a non-disparaging tone. However, *fengjian* was only a term. Despite discarding this term, Chinese federalists inherited *fengjian* as a Chinese tradition of local autonomy and as a late-Qing narrative of self-government: Zhang Taiyan still adhered to the idea of *si* despite his critique of *fengjian*; Zhang Shizhao paid acute attention to the relationship between self-cultivation and local self-government both during the *Tiger* period and after his ideological turn; even Chen Jiongming, as an advocate of village self-rule, was not entirely an enemy of *fengjian*. Furthermore, rather than simply reinterpreting *fengjian* along Western lines, they surpassed *fengjian* by critically engaging with a wide range of ideologies—Daoism, Buddhism, social Darwinism, parliamentarianism, guild socialism, anarchism, etc.—as they developed their federalist blueprints. Indeed, compromises were made, and imperfections still existed. Zhang Taiyan's plan for federal self-government, while posing a holistic challenge to Western modernity, still necessitated institutions such as elections and legislative assemblies. Chen Jiongming's political blueprint not only compromised the principle of self-government laid down by Zhang Taiyan but also contradicted Liu Shifu's anarchist attitude toward the state. And Zhang Shizhao certainly failed to elaborate on how agrarian culture could be transmitted to other professions and how a federation of professional groups could function alongside a federation of provinces. But it is undeniable that Chinese federalism was not merely a failed attempt at emulating the West. As this article demonstrates, Chinese federalists not

¹³⁴John Dewey, "Federalism in China," in *The Middle Works 1899–1924*, Volume 13, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 152.

only proposed sophisticated federalist ideas but also crystallized these ideas into concrete blueprints, laws, and actions. More importantly, although their federalist plans did not entirely depart from Western political values and institutions, they nonetheless encompassed a substantial critique of, if not a complete alternative to, Western political modernity.

Competing interests. The author declares none.