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Censorship and the Postal Service in China during World War One

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This paper focuses on the first state-organised nationwide postal censorship in China during World War I (WWI). The war had far-reaching effects on China, both in terms of the subsequent development of the internal political situation and her international relations. Although scholars share a meaningful view of China's 'internationalisation' during and after WWI, the immediate impact on China is rarely discussed. One area where the war did have a significant effect was Sino-European postal communication, as this was probably the first time that mail was subjected to censorship in China. This research draws on material from the diplomatic archives to discuss how the nationwide postal censorship was established in China and how it impacted the public during the war. It argues that WWI was a crucial moment for the Chinese government in establishing a comprehensive and nationwide system of postal censorship. Censorship was a government policy for war purposes and, most of all, something that was requested by both China's allies and enemies. This article suggests that this form of censorship during and after WWI overall reflects both that the Chinese government regarded it as a strategy to prevent information leakage, but that it was also a useful tool in domestic policy and diplomacy.

Keywords: postal service, censorship, World War One, Beiyang government

Introduction

With the Beiyang government's declaration of war on Germany and Austria-Hungary on 14 August 1917, China was officially drawn into participation in the First World War (Guo, 1979: 323). This war had far-reaching effects on China, both in terms of the subsequent development of the internal political situation and her international relations. In view of international history, Xu Guoqi argues that after the debacle of the 1895 First Sino-Japanese War, WWI was a critical moment when China strove to participate in the international community and to become recognised as an equal in "the family of nations". However, in his words, this is "an unwritten chapter in world history" (Xu Guoqi, 2004: 3-6). This may be because China did not send military forces to Europe or other theatres, and its active participation was shorter than that of other allied countries. Nonetheless, as scholars point out, thousands of Chinese labourers were sent to Europe to support the war effort from 1916 onwards, even though China had not yet declared war (Chen Sanjing, 1986; Xu Guoqi, 2000: 53-62; Xu Guoqi, 2004: 114-126; Gregory James, 2013).

Although Xu shares the view that China's 'internationalisation' during and after WWI was meaningful, the immediate impact of China's entry into the war is rarely discussed. Hence, it can seem that people in China might not have suffered or otherwise have been influenced by the war. However, one area where the war did have a significant effect was Sino-European civil communication through the postal service. As this paper will show, this probably was the first time that postal communication was subjected to state censorship.

Lane Harris noted that the Qing government firstly requested Robert Hart, the Inspector-General of the Chinese Customs and Posts, implement a degree of postal censorship in 1901 to suppress dissent in newspapers and stop newspapers from spreading by mail. Even though Hart refused at first, the government still forcibly implemented a system of censorship. This became even more institutionalised after the establishment of the new Police Bureau 巡警部, and the introduction of the Press Law of the Great Qing 大清印刷物專律 in China in 1905 and 1906. Harris provides an overview of "heavy and sporadic" censorship, initially adopted to maintain public order in China during the first half of the 20th century and which especially targeted seditious speech in the public sphere (Harris, 2012: 273-327). However, Harris's discussion ultimately focuses on censorship of press products, not letters, prior to the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. The essential difference of private letter censorship from censorship of periodicals distributed by mail is the impact such censorship has on people's private spheres, instead of the public sphere impacts of press censorship. Thus, postal censorship in China is deserving of further exploration.

In fact, postal censorship was employed not only for domestic social control but was also a strategy to prevent intelligence leaks. During WWI, censorship was often applied to soldiers' letters by combatant states (Demm, 2015; Kennedy, 2014: 26). Even the Chinese Labour Corps' mail from Europe to China was censored (James, 2013: 382). However, Chinese governmental documents show that the civil postal service was also involved in wartime censorship, especially as concerns international mail. How was postal censorship established, and how did it impact the public during the war? This paper will focus on the effects of WWI on the postal service to discuss the first state-organised nationwide postal censorship in China.

This paper will suggest that WWI was a crucial moment for the Chinese government in establishing a comprehensive nationwide system of postal censorship. It was not only a policy of the central government for war purposes but also a service that was requested by both China's allies and enemies. This form of censorship was related to both public communication and China's international relations. In addition to preventing information leakage during the war, postal censorship was a useful tool in domestic policy and diplomacy for the Chinese government.

The Beginnings of Censorship

Background

The Post Office in China was a new national service for public use established in 1896, emulating the Western model. The introduction of this state-owned postal service can be traced back to the advocacy of Sir Robert Hart (1835-1911), the Inspector-General of the Imperial Maritime Customs of China from 1861 onwards (Inspector General's Circulars No. 706 (Second Series), 9 April 1896). In 1896, the Imperial Chinese Postal Service (IPS, 大清郵政) was established and managed under the authority of the Maritime Customs. From 28 May 1911, it was moved from the Customs to the Ministry of Posts and Communications (郵傳部; (Jiaotong tiedao bu jiaotongshi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 1930: 23). Although the Qing Empire abruptly ended with the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, the Chinese Postal Service (CPS, 中華郵政) of the Republic of China peacefully continued the operations of the former Imperial Post Office and even inherited its management system based on foreign staff.

Scholars have been involved in the field of the postal history in modern China. In the past few decades, previous studies have pointed out that the postal reform between the late Qing and the early Republican era was part of the process of China's modernisation (Cheng, 1970: 5-7; Yan, 1994: 209-214). Nevertheless, such a 'modernisation' narrative is problematic. The definition of postal modernisation is based on a model of postal reform drawn from the West, especially the British postal reforms of 1840 (Cheng, 1970:2-3). Meanwhile, the concepts of postal modernisation are largely derived from an ideal of a state-run monopolistic postal service and often started the proposition with China's delayed postal modernisation so that may fall into a binary opposition between tradition and modernisation. One significant case is the study of China's original private-owned postal services, the 'letter hongs' (*min xin ju* 民信局), which were the main postal services active in China before the Post Office was established. These companies were the only services available to private individuals, as the Qing government's Imperial Courier System (*yizhan* 驛站) was for official use only (Yan, 1994:197-208). The letter hongs have previously been seen as a backward system that opposed the nationalisation of postal services, thereby hindering the process of postal modernisation in China (Cheng, 1970; Peng, 1992). However, the problem is that these studies seem to ignore the variability of the concept of 'modern', which can change over time. The letter hongs did not regress modernisation as argued by previous studies. Weipin Tsai suggests that the letter hongs, at least in Chongqing, did not decline with the opening of the Imperial Post Office but instead became more prosperous. This occurred even though the Post Office was expanding its monopolistic business via modern rail transit at the same time (Tsai, 2015: 895-930; Tsai, 2020: 34-47). As competitors, the letter hongs also cooperated with railway managers, although the Post Office considered it illegal. The modernity of the letter hongs was also shown in their business models, usage of modern transportation, and their cooperation and competition with the Post Office (Chen, 2022: 63-131). It seems that the variation in postal communication in late nineteenth and early twentieth century China provides more room for exploring postal modernity, rather than a confined approach that focuses only on the Western model and narrative of postal modernisation.

In addition, it cannot be ignored that this was all happening amid a complex international situation and in the context of domestic political disputes, which resulted in turmoil across the country. Nevertheless, the CPS was the only national postal agency in China. It was managed by foreigners, and the administration nominally and institutionally followed Beijing's orders despite political provincialism and the separation between the various warlord regimes. During the early Republican era, the inland delivery and service map of the CPS was expanding and growing. According to the CPS's annual reports, the numbers of post office branches continued to increase, and ever great numbers of letters, parcels, and newspapers were delivered by the Post Office (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts (hereafter, MOCDG), 1918: "Diagrams"). This suggests that more Chinese people were using its services for communication, and this national institution was flourishing and developing across the 1910s. On the other hand, in the 1910s the Republic of China was not a unified country as the former Qing dynasty has been. The political situation was generally unstable, especially after the Second Revolution in 1913. President Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859-1916) controlled the central government, the so-called Beiyang government in Beijing, and tried to establish a centralised political authority. Meanwhile, Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866-1925) led the Chinese Revolutionary Party 中華革命黨 to resist Yuan's power expansion in the south. Although the Second Revolution failed, military force emerged as a useful weapon for both the central and the provincial authorities in political disputes (McCord, 1993: 161-204). Warlords, different

political factions, and independent local powerholders controlled provincial regions. [1] After Yuan died in 1916, local areas became even more independent until the Guomindang were able to consolidate power in 1928.

Intriguingly, despite operating across a disunited country, the Chinese national postal service remained unified. The headquarters of this highly centralised state-owned enterprise were located in Beijing, and the Zongban 總辦 (the Postmaster-General; Wade-Giles *Tsung-pan*) took orders from the Beijing government without hesitation.[2] This involved Beijing as the internationally recognised central government of China with the membership of the Universal Postal Union (UPU). More importantly, the management of China's postal service was run by foreign employees, which made the service relatively independent from political disputes. As the CPS's records show, although its operation was extremely impacted by internal 'rebellions', it was still able to expand its business to almost all China's geographical areas in the 1910s, including warlord regimes (MOCDG, 1917: 4-43). Despite the Chinese Revolutionary Party and other provincial military powers resisting Beijing, the CPS was still able to maintain its centralised management from Beijing and deliver effective services locally. The following discussion is also in this context and will focus on Beijing and Tianjin.

Nevertheless, the developments in the international situation affected the operation s of the CPS to a certain extent. The Beijing government announced the severance of diplomatic relations with Germany and Austria-Hungary in March 1917, and then officially declared its entry into WWI in August. These actions had an immediate influence on the CPS operations, as former friends and partners were forced to become enemies. The Annual Report of 1917 indicates three main effects of WWI. Firstly, all German and Austrian employees of the Chinese Postal Service were forced to become enemies and "were consequently notified that their connection with the [Postal] Administration was severed forthwith" (MOCDG, 1918: 2). In addition, some employees were recruited for military service in the war. In terms of foreign management, similar to the Chinese Maritime Customs Service administration system, the staff shortage was an obvious consequence of the war for the CPS (MOCDG, 1918: 2, 13).

The second effect of the war was that international mail exchange and routes were impacted. The CPS stopped all Sino-German mail exchange and cooperation with the German Post Offices, which were widely established in the German concessions in China. Likewise, the United States closed the postal routes to Germany and its allies after the declaration of war. The parcel service to Europe was especially obstructed. This is because the war called for emergency shipping, and so the British colonial postal services, such as Hong Kong and India, suspended parcel delivery over their routes. Many restrictions and prohibitions on parcel delivery were also applied between belligerent countries (MOCDG, 1918: 12-13).

The third effect was that "with a view to protecting the [Chinese] State as much as possible against the activities of enemy residents, censorship of mail matter was instituted by the

[1] The term 'warlord' is controversial as a description of the military leaders in the early Republican era. This chapter does not want to engage in this debate but rather adopts the term as a generally accepted expedient to refer to the military leaders often known as warlords in Republican China.

[2] The position of *zongban*, Postmaster-General in English, was occupied by a series of Frenchmen between 1901 and 1928, until the Guomindang took power. A. Theophile Piry (1850-1918) was the first French zongban between 1901 and 1915; H. Picard-Destelan (1878-1971) was acting zongban in 1915 and succeeded formally to the post in 1917. Although the position was still called zongban in Chinese, the official English title was changed to Associate Director General between 1915 and 1917, and then to be Co-Director General in 1917, when Picard-Destelan was officially promoted (MOCDG, 1915: 1; 1917: 1; 1928: 2).

Chinese Government" (MOCDG, 1918: 2). This shows that the CPS could not challenge government demands for censorship; it had to comply with the requirements of the declaration of war. Most importantly, it was the first time that the Chinese central government organised postal censorship of private letters on a nationwide scale, based on analysis of CPS records.

Postal censorship at the central government level had started and was institutionalised before WWI. As Harris has argued, it can be traced back to the last years of the Qing dynasty. In fact, after the establishment of the Republic, postal censorship was only institutionalised because of the political situation in the early Republican era. Yuan's government ordered a series of censorship regulations and mail prohibitions targeting his political opponents (Harris, 2012: 280-282). Moreover, the 1912 Martial Law 戒嚴法 gave local military authorities a legal basis for censorship (*Shenbao*, 5 December 1912: 1; *Shenbao*, 28 September 1913: 2). There are several news reports in the Shanghai daily newspaper *Shenbao*, for example, indicating that military and administrative bureaucracies at both the central and local levels often interfered with the work of the Postal Office. They would ask to examine letters during wars and conflicts, which was legal under martial law. For example, in October 1915, when Hubei was under martial law, the police department received instructions to send censors to post offices to examine the mail (*Shenbao*, 31 October 1915: 7; *Shenbao*, 14 November 1915: 7).

However, regardless of their nationality, the private mail of ordinary people was generally not an issue of concern and was rarely directly affected by censorship. One reason was that the censorship's targets were basically the members of Chinese Revolutionary Party and their publications defaming the government and inciting subversion of the country (*Shenbao*, 30 April 1915: 10) Another reason was that several countries had established their own post offices which served both Chinese and foreigners. In 1913, the Post Office reported that postal censorship was useless because mail that passed through foreign post offices was hard to examine (*Shenbao*, 28 September 1913: 2). More importantly, censorship in China was still little institutionalised, and just beginning to develop at the central government level during Yuan's presidency. The CPS was a very young system and moreover was managed by foreigners in the early Republican era, and so it makes sense that the government was still exploring ways to use this new institution as a measure to monitor society. As the later discussion will show, WWI inadvertently stimulated the development of more systematic postal censorship in China. In addition, although a centralised and nominally state-owned postal service is regarded as component element of China's modernisation of postal communication, the 'modernised' postal service also meant that the state could monitor private communications in the name of public security.

The other important aspect that pertains to issues of postal censorship was the international context in which the development of the Chinese postal service from the late Qing to the early Republican era happened. The domestic background to China's participation in WWI was that since the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Chinese elites had attempted to put forward a new concept of the world based on a "nationalist internationalism" with the aim of saving China, as Xu Guoqi points out (Xu Guoqi, 2004: 59). He argues the rise of nationalism in China was a part of China's internationalisation and a result of the Western military and economic invasion in the late nineteenth century. He quotes Rebecca Karl's discussion that the nationalism was the Chinese people's "redefinitions of themselves and of the world" (Karl, 2002: 201). He suggests that in the early stage of nationalism in China, nationalism and internationalism were "two sides of the same coin" (Xu Guoqi, 2004: 58). Specifically, as per Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 (1873-1929) idea of "new citizen" 新民, a Chinese should be also a member of the world (Xu Guoqi, 2004: 58). The nationalist internationalism then gradually,

rather than suddenly, influenced the Republican Government's foreign policies. As Yuan Shikai claimed in 1913, a new republic of China would "join the family of nations" (Yuan, cited in Xu Guoqi, 2004: 58). However, the process of China joining the UPU provides a similar but different example. The Qing Court firstly asked to join the UPU just after the Post Office opened in 1896. The government even appointed representatives to the UPU to act as observers twice, in 1897 and 1906 (Xu Fengyuan, 2005: 4-7. Although China ultimately joined the UPU only in 1914 due to insufficient development of the Chinese postal service and the chaotic domestic situation (Harris, 2012: 119), it indicates that the Chinese government understood the importance of international participation and acted to join relevant international bodies very early. Modern forms of national postal service led to a new order of international communication. This provided a link for China to participate in international affairs, by which China could enact its ideals of internationalism. As the following discussion will show, postal censorship was not merely an internal strategy but related to international relations, especially during WWI.

The Japanese Challenge

Although China was not involved in WWI at the very beginning, the new international situation affected China and international postal communication. Unlike China, Japan immediately entered the War in August 1914. The Japanese army suddenly occupied the German leased territory of Jiaozhou-Qingdao, namely the Kiautschou Bay concession in Shandong, together with British forces in November 1914. This caused the relations between China and Japan to deteriorate rapidly. The Japanese government further issued the famous Twenty-One Demands (対華 21 ヶ条要求) to China in February 1915. These asked the Chinese government to hand all the German rights and influence in China over to Japan and attempted to obtain interests in every aspect of China. This eventually led to severe tensions between these two countries (Guo, 1979: 154-168). As a result, some local authorities at the provincial level sought to prevent Japan's expansionism from worsening and raised awareness of Japanese intentions. One of the strategies was the organisation of mail censorship at the provincial level.

The pro-Yuan Governor of Shandong, Cai Rukai 蔡儒楷 (1869-1923), requested permission to censor mail across the whole province in December 1915, just after Yuan proclaimed himself emperor. Cai proposed checking any suspicious mail from abroad and from foreign post offices in China, regardless of whether recipients were foreigners or Chinese. He asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to forward this censorship measure to foreign diplomatic missions (Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica (hereafter MHAS), 03-02-087-01-003, 14 December 1915). He was likely aiming at Japan. He employed other strategies to counter Japanese intentions after Japan's occupation of German territories in his province.[3] The MOFA refused his request to censor foreign recipients' mail because it did not recognise Shandong as an alert area, and considered that this censorship may enrage foreign missions without justifiable cause (MHAS 03-02-087-01-004, 15 December 1915).

Another case occurred in Harbin, Jilin province, in April 1916. According to Fu Qiang 傅彊, the Commissioner of Foreign Affairs for Jilin (外交部特派吉林交涉員),[4] the Jilin

[3] Cai Rukai had prevented Japan's expansion in Shandong even before the war, via means such as his advocacy of the development of Longkou port (Zhang, 1982: 257).

[4] Offices of the Commissioner of Foreign Affairs 交涉員公署 were bureaucratic institutions established in every treaty port by MOFA, active from 1912 to 1929. The Commissioners represented the government in

provincial government followed the orders of the Commander-in-Chief's Office (統率辦事處) to implement postal censorship and appointed censors to post offices. However, the censor in the Harbin Post Office always selected letters addressed to Japanese residents and ignored postal staff's advice. The Harbin Post Office asked Commissioner Fu for help. Fu then reported to the MOFA and requested that a reference copy of the UPU Convention be sent to him (MHAS 03-02-087-01-005, 19 April 1916). After the MOFA sought the opinion of the Ministry of Communications (MOC), they replied to Fu that the President had issued the "Regulations for Censorship of Seditious Mail Items" (檢查扣留煽亂郵件章程) the previous year.[5] These regulations included an article stipulating that foreign mail should not be examined; if this type of mail was suspicious, censors should report to the Directorate General of Posts (DG) 郵政總局 for instructions (MHAS 03-02-087-01-007, 008, 24-27 April 1916).

The above cases illustrate that the censorship orders from Beijing were not originally supposed to target Japan and other foreign countries. Instead, its objects were 'internal rebellions' as the National Protection Army 護國軍 and the Chinese Revolutionary Party, who had launched anti-Yuan activities around the country since Yuan prepared to be emperor (*Shenbao*, 8 January 1916: 10; *Shenbao*, 2 April 1916: 6). However, the actual practice at the local level was different. This must be seen in the context of the volatile state of Sino-Japanese relations at the same time. In fact, after Japan occupied the German concession territory of Kiautschou Bay, Shandong, in 1914, and issued the Twenty-One Demands in 1915, Chinese people and local governments both exhibited anti-Japanese sentiment.[6] Shandong and Jilin were the two provinces on the frontlines of the emerging conflict between China and Japan. Thus, while censorship could be a strategy devised by the central government to counter domestic 'rebellions', these local governments followed the orders from Beijing but refocused them, targeting Japan. In general, the Beijing government itself generally avoided touching foreign mail at this stage, as these two cases show.

In addition, the Beijing government administration system and postal censorship were not highly institutionalised in the early Republican era. Although the Regulation for Censorship of Sedition had been issued, both local and central government officials were not genuinely familiar with the rules, with the exception of MOC and postal office staff. This implies that this important document affecting the international postal service was not released to local authorities, as Commissioner Fu's attempt to seek solutions from the UPU Convention in order to reduce the possibility of international disputes suggests. Nonetheless, Fu would have been disappointed if he had received the UPU Convention. The Convention contained no articles that could have regulated international mail censorship in 1916.[7]

More importantly, the Post Office was not empowered to handle postal censorship, although its staff were more familiar with the rules than other local officials. As the annual report of the CPS mentions, the unstable situation in 1916 caused "disastrous consequences", including "strict censorship" in many areas (MOCDG, 1917: 1). This implies that the Post Office had to work in conjunction with local authorities and did not have the authority to direct

dealing with foreign affairs at the local level and was answerable to the MOFA. On the MOFA's institutional transformation in the Beiyang period see Tang, accessed 08.01.2017.

[5] The document cited here does not include all eight articles of this regulation, but it does note that Yuan issued these regulations in 1915.

[6] For example, anti- Japanese events were held in Hankou after the publication of the 21 Demands (Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1974: 856; *Shenbao*, 11 April 1915: 6).

[7] The UPU Convention of Rome was agreed in 1906 and replaced by the Convention of Madrid in 1920 (UPU, 1907;UPU, 1922).

the censorship process, even though it was in charge of postal communication for whole country. Interestingly, despite unclear accountability within the administration for postal censorship, the final solution was turned back to the MOC, the supervisor of the CPS.

Institutionalisation of Censorship for Foreign Mail Items during the War

After China declared war in 1917, a nationwide regime of censorship was instantly established. The implementation of postal censorship was ordered by the MOC. The DG in Beijing was requested to give its approval and implement the order. On 25 August, the DG issued a postal circular with the Regulations for Postal Censorship 檢查辦法 to its subordinate post offices. The regulations stipulated that, firstly, all the mail exchanged between Chinese and enemy nationals as well as all other foreigners were to be examined as long as they were delivered by the CPS with exceptions only for Chinese government communications and official documents sent by diplomatic missions. Secondly, censorship offices were to be set up in post offices in all important locations and commercial ports, and the provincial authorities to appoint censors. Thirdly, it was required that the process of censorship should be rapid and maintain the secrecy of correspondence. Once a letter passed the examination, it was to be stamped by way of confirmation and delivered (*Shenbao*, 26 August 1917: 10).

There was a gap between planning and execution, in that the regulations could not reach the local areas that were not controlled by Beijing during the Warlord Era. Even in the pro-Beijing areas, the lack of preparation and experience, combined with the vagueness of the Regulations, immediately created problems. According to the Regulations, all letters had to be censored. The Shanghai local government organised censorship for telegrams in foreign languages and appointed censors to telegram offices (*Shenbao*, 25 August 1917: 10; *Shenbao*, 29 August 1917: 10), but postal censorship had still not been implemented as of September 1917. This was because Shanghai had the biggest volume of mail passing through its postal offices in the country. Combined with the complicated censorship procedures, this made it difficult to process all the letters that should have been examined under the Regulations. Thus the Shanghai Military Commander 淞滬護軍使, who was supposed to have the responsibility for appointing censors in accordance with the Regulations, reported the situation in Shanghai to the MOC and proposed a flexible solution. Namely, the Commander suggested that censorship should just focus on German and Austrian mail items and should carefully process the letters sent by or to "enemy" nationals (*Shenbao*, 8 September 1917: 10).

Despite diplomatic immunity, postal censorship in practice could not absolutely ensure the exclusion of diplomatic mail. The treatment of personal letters from and to diplomatic missions immediately became a problem. On 30 August, Yang Zengxin 楊增新 (1864-1928), Governor of Xinjiang, reported to Beijing that the Regulations confused him. He could not distinguish between private and diplomatic mail if they were sent from individuals from allied and neutral nations to their diplomatic missions in China. The vague definitions in the new Regulations also made it difficult to identify the sender's nationality (MHAS 03-02-088-01-010, 011, 012, 30 August to 3 September 1917). Yang faced complex conditions insofar as Xinjiang bordered Russia, and was close to several countries' sphere of influence, including Britain, Russia, Turkey, and Germany (MHAS 03-02-087-05-013, 5 November 1917). Even before the Regulations were issued, Yang had been implementing censorship over foreign mail in an attempt to gather useful information for Beijing in the wake of the Russian February Revolution, as he was concerned about potential repercussions in Xinjiang (Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1961: 108-109). The new Regulations appeared to be hindering his mission instead. He could not censor all foreign mail, especially those private letters

pretending to be diplomatic documents. Nonetheless, the MOC responded with clear directions stating that letters written by foreigners to diplomatic missions did not have to be examined (MHAS 03-02-088-01-015, 1 September 1917).

Meanwhile, some German and Austrian nationals were found to be using the diplomatic channels of neutral countries to send their letters. A. H. Hyland, the Postal Commissioner for Zhili 直隸, reported that a man named Franz Siebert was acting as the representative of "the Delegate for Tianjin of the Royal Netherlands in China" and claimed that:

> "Letters addressed to German subjects in Peking and stamped on the back with the official seal of the Dutch representative for German (and Austrian) interests in Tientsin - Delegate for Tientsin of the Royal Netherlands Legation in China – never are delivered to the addresses by the Peking Post Office." (MHAS 03-02-087-02-019, 27 August 1917)

He stressed that the actions taken by the Peking Post Office were "absolutely illegal" and argued that this type of letter should have the same diplomatic immunity as regular diplomatic documents, which should not have been censored or delayed (MHAS 03-02-087-02-019, 27 August 1917).

Intriguingly, Siebert was originally not a Dutch diplomat but the former German Vice-Consul in Tianjin.[8] He had been an interpreter for the German Consulate in Fengtian, and was Acting Consul in 1912 (MHAS 03-09-001-01-001, 10 April 1912). After China broke diplomatic ties with Germany, he suddenly changed his identity, claiming to be "the Delegate for Tientsin of the Royal Netherlands Legation". According to Chinese government documents, Siebert became a Dutch official who "interfered in local affairs" 干預地方事務, which irritated local authorities (MHAS 03-36-048-01-031, 12 September 1917). In fact, this Dutch "Delegate" remained employed at the former Consulate of Germany in Tianjin (MHAS 03-02-087-02-019, 10 September 1917), which suggests that this former German diplomat was still serving the German people. It is difficult to exclude the possibility that former German and Austrian diplomats were escaping postal censorship systems intended to target 'enemies' through use of the Dutch protective umbrella.

The Dutch Delegate for Tientsin also made an almost simultaneous protest to Huang Rongliang 黃榮良 (1876-?), the Tianjin Commissioner of Foreign Affairs. Huang believed that the trouble was caused by the defective censorship regulations. The censors recognised Siebert met the requirements for mail censorship as enemy residents' mail should be examined, especially he was a "famous enemy person" 知名敵國人 (MHAS 03-02-087-04-005, 22 September 1917).

This incident raised a tricky issue which was not clearly addressed in the Regulations: should censors open and examine letters sent from embassies and consulates to enemy nationals? On the one hand, the Regulations specified exemptions for official documents, as well as exempting foreign letters that carried the seals of diplomatic missions. On the other hand, it also requested that censors must examine mail sent by or to enemy nationals. Censors were faced with a dilemma between ensuring diplomatic immunity and identifying enemies. Beijing found that enemy nationals could and were using diplomatic channels to evade censorship and realised the Regulations could not effectively solve the controversy (MHAS

[8] Although Siebert's name is given as *Xibeite* 西貝特 in this document, he was generally named *Xiguxian* 希古賢 in other Chinese documents.

03-02-087-04-001, 17 September 1917). Significantly, the Dutch Embassy played a special role in this affair. In fact, not only the former German legation guard, but also members of the Austrian legation guard too were incorporated into the Dutch legation guard. The Dutch guards claimed that they were authorised to receive mail items for the Austrian guards (MHAS 03-02-087-02-008, 25 August 1917). Although the Netherlands was a neutral country in the war, its Embassy was working to find loopholes in the Regulations and attempted to do everything possible to protect the interests of Germany and Austria. This may be because the Netherland's diplomatic policy was to balance belligerents on both sides against each other.[9]

At the same time, the Beijing government was cautious in its avoidance of any international trouble, even though they took a firm stand against 'enemies', meaning that letters from and to Germans and Austrians should be censored (MHAS 03-02-087-04-002, 17 September 1917; *Shenbao*, 22 September 1916: 10). As to the problem of enemy mail with a Dutch seal, the MOFA consulted other ministries to solve this controversy. The MOC, for example, understood that this was not only related to postal censorship but to diplomacy and local security (MHAS, 03-02-087-04-007, 2 October 1917). The Ministry of the Interior (MOI) said they had to accept the mail with the official seal of diplomatic missions, because martial law was not declared everywhere, especially Beijing and Tianjin where the Dutch missions were located were not areas of military conflicts between warlord regimes at that time; the government had no legal basis for examining all letters (MHAS, 03-02-087-04-010, 3 November 1917). This reflects that the Martial law was the only legal basis for local postal censorship at that time. If there was no declaration of martial law, any and all censorship would lack legality. The Ministry of War (MOW) consulted with the British Minister to China, Sir John Newell Jordan (1852-1925). He conveyed to all foreign ministers that none of the diplomatic missions' official or private mail matters should be examined (MHAS, 03-02-087-04-013, 14 November 1917). Beijing ultimately recognised that all mail items of diplomatic missions, regardless of the addressee, were exempted from censorship. They realised that it would be a meaningless struggle that would simply cause dissatisfaction on the part of the diplomatic missions. As far as the Beijing government was concerned, foreigners seemed to have many ways to circumvent censorship for sending letters. In fact, other foreign post offices in China could equally be employed in order to evade censorship (MHAS, 03-02-087-04-013, 14 November 1917).

The Beijing government suffered from the complexity of the situation, while the deficiencies of the Regulations themselves had caused a diplomatic dispute. Given those ongoing issues, the government revised the censorship regulations and issued a more detailed version, the Censorship Regulations for Foreign Mail (檢查洋文郵件辦法). These were drafted by the Post Office and released to provincial authorities in November 1917 (MHAS, 03-02-087-04-014, 19 November 1917).

The new regulations were more specific, providing guidelines for possible situations that the censors had experienced since the declaration of war. There were two main types of mail items, mail received and mail sent. Under the regulations, all received mail should be passed to censors at the post offices. Letters sent by Chinese and allied citizens were exempt, and so they could be prioritised for delivery without being opened for censorship, as long as there was no other reason to detain the mail had no reason. Mail received by citizens of neutral countries

[9] For research on the policy of neutrality and historical background of the Netherlands in the First World War, see Abbenhuis, 2006 and Wolf, 2013: esp. 1-34. Abbenhuis also discusses the long-term formation of Dutch neutrality before the war, on this, see Abbenhuis, 2014.

was of second priority, but had to go through the censorship process. Mail to enemy citizens was of the last priority and had to be censored. Sending mail, however, basically required no censorship. Only letters addressed to enemy citizens in inland areas without a censor station, and mail items addressed to people in neutral countries were required to be examined before dispatch (MHAS 03-02-087-04-014, 19 November 1917). The regulations did not note any diplomatic exceptions; all foreign mail was equally subject to censorship if it was sent by or to enemy nationals, regardless of who sent or received it. Significant evidence for this is contained in a protest against censorship sent by Dutch Minister to China Willem Jacob Oudendijk (1874-1953) in October 1919. His note shows that any letter, whether diplomatic mail or not, that was sent by or to a German citizen would be examined, even after the end of the war (MHAS, 03-02-089-03-010, 25 October 1919).

Although this policy and associated censorship measures were issued by the Beijing government, this does not mean that it was implemented in the same way everywhere in China. At this moment, China was divided into several relatively independent regimes that did not, with few exceptions, answer to Beijing. According to the annual reports of the CPS, many local conflicts and bandit activity seriously affected and even interrupted the Post Office's operations. Essential services such as the delivery of mail could not be guaranteed, even less the systematic implementation of a censorship system (MOCDG, 1917, 1918 and 1919).

Moreover, some Beijing-controlled areas could not implement censorship regulations in full because they did not have enough staff to examine all foreign mail items. In October 1917, Harold I. Harding (1883-1943), the British Embassy Counsellor, conveyed a message from British Minister Sir Jordan asking China to imprison or surveil three suspicious Germans. The three individuals in question were a German language teacher and her assistant in the Preparatory School of Henan for Study Abroad in Europe and the US 河南留歐美預備學校, Ms M. Netz and H. Linzmeyer, and a former staff member to the Chinese Maritime Customs. They were suspected to be German agents as they “acted strangely” (行蹤詭秘) and were considered dangerous, in view of their influence on young Chinese students (MHAS 03-36-047-01-056, 16 October 1917; MHAS 03-36-047-01-060, 8 November 1917). They were secretly tracked by the local authorities, as there was no postal censor with German language training in Henan (MHAS 03-36-047-01-056, 16 October 1917; MHAS 03-36-047-01-060, 8 November 1917).

The censorship regulations as implemented after China’s declaration of war had some impact on the operation of the postal service and its usage by the public, especially foreign language letters. However, overall, its implementation must be seen as patchy at best. Nonetheless, the implementation of postal censorship by the Beijing government can be regarded as the beginning of the institutionalisation of censorship for the needs of the international war effort, as opposed to merely internal social control. In addition, during this initial process, it implies that the Beijing government attempted to join international society and carefully amended its regulations to avoid arousing controversy, regardless of the diversity of conditions adhering within its local areas. The following section will move on to negotiations around the transportation of Sino-German mail and postal censorship as a solution for postal resumption.

Censorship as a Solution for the Discontinued Sino-German Postal Service

Negotiation

Postal communication was extremely obstructed for people who lived in foreign countries during the war. During this period, it was more challenging and difficult to communicate with their families in their home countries. From the perspective of national security, censorship of communications is a means to prevent the leakage of military intelligence and other sensitive information. However, the consequence was that postal communication between China and Germany was almost entirely interrupted, and this eventually affected civilians on both sides.

The Dutch Minister in China, Frans Beelaerts van Blokland (1872-1956), stressed that German and Chinese people were worried about their family and friends living in hostile countries due to the extended interruption of postal services (MHAS, 03-02-088-02-007, 5 August 1918). The inconvenience of communication also impacted Chinese nationals in Germany, especially students. In December 1918, although the war was now over, the Chinese Minister to Denmark, Wei-ching Williams Yen 顏惠慶 (1877-1950) reported to Beijing that the postal service between China and Germany was still defunct. Many Chinese students in Germany were extremely anxious as they had been unable to receive letters from their families in China for over a year. Their letters, however, had all been transferred to Denmark and retained in the Chinese Embassy there. A medical student, Chen Yu-cang 陳雨蒼 (1889-1947), who was a member of the Diligent Work-Frugal Study Movement 勤工儉學運動 and became a famous physician after he graduated (Lee, 2013: 73), came to the German Foreign Ministry to ask for his mail. Other students tried to ask the Danish Embassy in Berlin for help. Yen was informed of this situation via Danish diplomatic channels, and thus he tried to reverse engineer a solution using diplomatic channels to deliver students' letters to Berlin. This did not work, and the letters were eventually sent back to Yen's office (MHAS, 03-02-088-02-014, 9 December 1918).

Intriguingly, postal censorship could also be a solution for restoring postal communications. If both hostile sides accepted the postal resumption agreement based on the principle that letters would be examined by the other side and then handed over to a third party for transit, this would help restore civilian postal communication during the difficult time of the war. In fact, this was requested by the German government via third parties, namely Denmark and the Netherlands. Even though the possibility of strategic considerations behind this request cannot be excluded, their main purpose was to restore a basic postal service for civilians living in enemy countries.

These special negotiations over international postal communication began in May 1917, which was approximately two months after China had broken off diplomatic relations with Germany. Because direct postal and telegram communications between the two countries had stopped immediately,[10] the negotiations relied on Denmark as a third-party diplomatic channel. It is likely that the Chinese government wanted to ensure that Chinese overseas in Germany could continue sending mail to China. The German government answered that once Chinese overseas' unsealed letters had passed censorship in Germany, they could be transferred through the German-Danish diplomatic channel to Denmark where the Chinese Embassy was located. However, Germany also asked a reciprocal condition that German overseas who stayed in China could send letters via the Dutch Embassy in Beijing (MHAS 03-02-088-02-001, 2 June 1917). Minister Yen conveyed the German request to Beijing and received approval, which included a proviso that the Chinese government would examine German letters before delivery

[10] After China broke off the relations with Germany in 1917, the Chinese Minister to Germany, Sweden, and Denmark, Wei-ching Yen, moved the Embassy from Germany to Denmark and changed his title to that of the Minister to Sweden and Denmark (Renming quanwei jiansuo xitong, accessed 15 December 2016).

via the Dutch Embassy (MHAS, 03-02-088-02-002, 7 June 1917).

The proposal was approved by both sides by the end of July 1917. However, the measures for postal exchange and transit only stipulated procedures for the dispatch of overseas mail dispatch, with no provisions made for the receipt of mail. Therefore, the German government continued to request a solution so that Germans overseas in China would be able to receive mail from Germany via the Dutch diplomatic channels, if the mail in question passed China's censorship procedures. Likewise, Chinese overseas in Germany would be able to receive letters from China via the Danish embassy in Germany, with German censorship applied prior to delivery (MHAS 03-02-088-02-003,6 August 1917; MHAS 03-02-088-02-004, 20 October 1917). This time, Beijing did not reply immediately.

There is no clear evidence to show why Beijing did not proceed with negotiations for over two months, but it was probably due to China's unstable political situation. The Beijing government was involved in a series of political struggles. President Li Yuanhong 黎元洪 (1864-1928) disagreed with Prime Minister Duan Qirui 段祺瑞 (1865-1936)'s decision to severe diplomatic relations with Germany. Even though it was eventually solved courtesy of the mediation of Vice-President Feng Guozhang 馮國璋 (1858-1919), Li and Duan still disagreed over Chinese participation in the war. This caused a serious crisis as Li sacked Duan on the 23rd May, whereupon eight local military governors declared independence from Beijing in support of Duan. Li therefore called warlord Zhang Xun 張勳 (1854-1923) to Beijing for mediation, and dissolved Parliament on 13 June. This all occurred just days after Minister Yen received the last massage from Beijing concerning the postal negotiations. As a famous consequence, Zhang came to Beijing but launched the Manchu Restoration on the 1st July (Guo, 1979: 287-288, 296-311; Xu Guoqi, 2004: 212-219). Political turbulence obstructed Beijing in effectively managing its foreign affairs.

On the 23rd October 1917, Minister Yen finally received Beijing's reply to Germany's last proposal, but the answer was negative. Beijing felt that the German government had made it difficult for Chinese diplomats and students to leave the country after China declared war during WWI. The Chinese side set the tone, by refusing to give any answer on the issue of Sino-German wartime postal services before Chinese students were allowed to leave freely (MHAS, 03-02-088-02-005, 23 October 1918). The issue remained unresolved, as there was no further answer from the Chinese government for the next ten months.

The German government conveyed a message via the Danish and Dutch governments asking Beijing again about their proposal in August 1918 (MHAS 03-02-088-02-006, 3 August 1918; MHAS 03-02-088-02-007, 5 August 1918). The Chinese government still refused: "Although [the measure] seems to be equal and appropriate, it would not tally with the facts in practical operation" (表面上似甚平允，但按諸實際恐不盡然). They only recognised the previous agreement that both sides' nationals overseas could send, but not receive, mail that had passed censorship and transmitted via third countries (MHAS 03-02-088-02-011, 13 August 1918).

This provisional measure for international postal censorship and transit was only one-way. Even after the war, Beijing still did not accept Berlin's new proposal. Although there was no clear explanation from Beijing, the diplomatic archives imply, on the one hand, that China may be subject demands made by its allies. On the other hand, the Chinese government also looked to ensure a favourable position for itself. The British Minister Sir Jordan once sent a *note*

verbale to protest that British censors found that a mailbag for the Chinese Minister in Denmark included "enemies' private letters." It proved that Germans overseas in China had entrusted Chinese diplomatic missions to transfer mail to Germany (MHAS 03-02-088-02-012, 15 October 1918). The Chinese MOFA immediately issued a circular stating that enemy nationals were not allowed to use Chinese diplomatic channels for communications (MHAS, 03-02-088-02-013, 17 October 1918). This case shows the UK's role in the implementation of postal censorship in China and the dilemma faced by Beijing in adjusting the treatment of its former friends who had become enemies. Most importantly, China strove to establish itself as an equal in international affairs and therefore tried to avoid unnecessary disputes, while its bureaucracy was perhaps slow to adjust to the country's new position following the declaration of war.

Even though WWI ended on 11 November 1918, the postal issue had not been solved. After the negotiation through the Dutch Minister Beelaerts van Blokland, an agreement was finally made at the end of 1918, although it was still only a one-way measure which permitted Chinese and German overseas to send letters but not receive them from their home countries. Postal censorship and transmission finally began on the 17th December, when the war had already ended over a month earlier. However, there is no evidence to show that this postal agreement was made thanks to the Armistice. In fact, the documents show that the Chinese government still regarded Germany as an 'enemy'. Nevertheless, it seems that censorship was a necessary requirement to eventually make the sending of mail possible under certain limited conditions.

The Process of Postal Censorship

The starting point of this negotiation between China and Germany was the need to secure a civil postal service during wartime, instead of an initial aim to control sensitive information. As mentioned above, MOFA was in charge of the negotiations, which were ultimately resolved based on principles of diplomatic immunity. However, this postal censorship in practical operation was a cooperative task that involved different government departments. Not surprisingly, the Post Office played the most crucial role for in receipt of mail, dispatch, and delivery as these were the regular functions of the agency. The censors were appointed by local police departments. As the censorship process was implemented from the declaration of war onwards, it was a cooperation between the Post Office, the Police Department, the central government and the local authorities.

According to the agreement between the Dutch Minister and the Chinese MOFA, the Dutch embassy would collect German private letters and send them to the Chinese MOFA every Tuesday. They were to be accompanied by a *note verbale* clearly stating the number of letters and with an attached mail list. After undergoing the censorship process conducted by Chinese officials, the letters would be sealed up in an envelope, stamped and sent back to the embassy with a list of those letters that had been retained (MHAS, 03-02-088-02-019, 20 December 1918). Finally, the embassy would send the envelopes through the diplomatic channel (MHAS, 03-02-088-02-022, 26 December 1918). This means that the letters that had passed censorship would be regarded as diplomatic documents, collected into the diplomatic bags and thus protected by diplomatic immunity.

However, problems immediately emerged. One was the question of who would be responsible for the censorship of letters in practice. The MOFA made the agreement, but they were not charged with conducting the necessary censorship (MHAS 03-02-088-02-018, 19 December 1918). Another problem was that there was little time to prepare and organise

censorship. The agreement was confirmed by the MOFA on 16th December 1918, and the Dutch announced that they would start this process from 24th December. This means the Chinese side had only one week to prepare (MHAS 03-02-088-02-016, 16 December 1918; MHAS 03-02-088-02-19, 20 December 1918).

As the previous discussion highlighted, postal censorship was originally handled by the local authorities in local areas that were under martial law. After the declaration of war, postal censorship became a multi-departmental issue with the involvement of various authorities, primarily focused on foreign mail. In the previous cases, we can see that MOFA was responsible for negotiation with foreign missions, the Post Office and the MOC were both responsible for mail transportation and the implementation of censorship regulations; the MOW was in charge of practical operations of censorship with local force authorities. However, in terms of the agreement with the Dutch Minister, MOFA did not know which department should have the responsibility for implementation of this special task, even though previous experiences of domestic censorship had included foreign language letters (MHAS 03-02-088-02-018, 023, 19-26 December 1918).

In order to fulfil the agreement to organise censorship, the MOFA asked other bureaus for assistance. The MOI thought that martial law could be applicable so the MOW would be in charge. They suggested that the overseas German mail could be sent for examination at a temporary censorship station in the Police Bureau of the Capital City 京師警察廳. This station was commissioned by the MOW and operated according to the Censorship Regulations for Foreign Language Mail (MHAS 03-02-088-02-020, 21 December 1918). On the other hand, the Police Bureau suggested that there was an Inspection Office 檢查處 in the Qianmen Post Office 前門郵局 that was competent and more efficient. This, however, was a cross-departmental office whose censors were appointed by the MOC in cooperation with the police department, and who carried out their work in the post office (MHAS 03-02-088-02-025, 30 December 1918). This indicates that various departments involved in and separately directed postal censorship during the war, despite the efforts of the government to create a coherent process through the issuing of the Regulations. Thanks to the Police Bureau, they even designed a sort of simplified form of duplicate receipt to replace the complicated paperwork attendant on exchanges of official documents. Consequently, the MOFA gladly accepted the Police Bureau's solution and delegated the censorship requirements to the Inspection Office in the Qianmen Post Office (MHAS 03-02-088-02-028, 31 December 1918). Moreover, in order to increase efficiency, they asked the MOC to appoint an additional censor with German-language skills to assist (MHAS 03-02-088-02-025, 30 December 1918).

Although the Dutch Embassy had claimed that the special postal service and censorship would start on 24 December, the first round of censorship finally began on 31st December 1918. The censorship process was substantial, in that the Chinese MOFA would receive mail from the Dutch Embassy then forward it to the censors of the Inspection Office. After examination, the censors would pick out any suspicious letters and return the passed letters with a list that showing the number of kept letters and the numbers passed and a summary of letter contents. Subsequently, the mail was sealed into envelopes by MOFA, then given back to the Dutch Embassy with the list. The envelopes, which encased German letters, were finally dispatched within the diplomatic bags by international postal transportation.[11]

[11] Almost every time the process was conducted, letters and receipts were recorded and documented in the archives of Beiyang MOFA, see MHAS, 03-02-088-02-026 to 126, 26 December 1918 to 10 October 1919.

Figure 1 shows the number of censored German letters passed through the special postal process per week. The data is from December 1918 to 10 October 1919. The number censored increases dramatically in the first month, but it goes down immediately in the second month—the graph peaks on 21 January at about 350 letters. The letters that emerge in large numbers at the beginning reflects that letters from German nationals could not be dispatched to Germany in the immediate months preceding. In fact, Chinese-German mail exchange had ceased since the break-off of diplomatic relations in March 1917 (MOCDG, 1918: 12). Once the postal service was restored, the backlog of letters reduced and a more stable trend of letters sent emerges. After February 1919, there are almost no instances in which more than 50 letters per week are censored, although there are no exact records extant for the period between 8th July and 10th October.

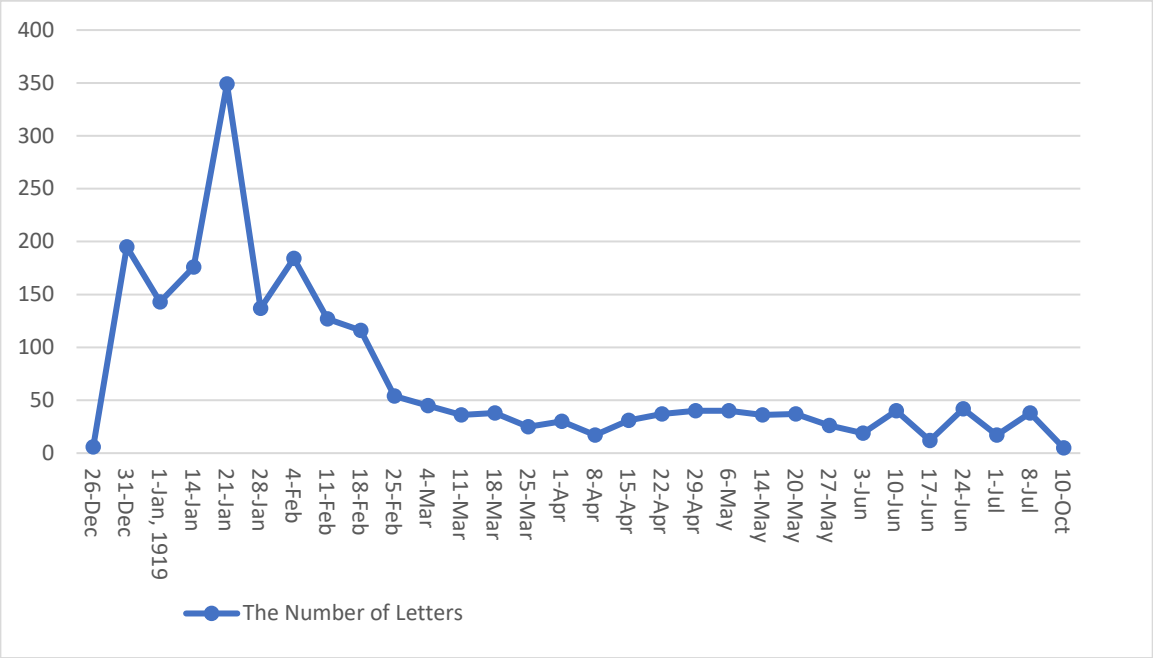

Figure 1: The number of censored letters, December 1918 to October 1919 (MHAS, 03-02-088-02-026 to 126)

The numbers of letters, especially in the first month, demonstrate how the war impacted the civil postal service for a particular group of foreign nationals living in China, and hence pressures on the German government to seek an alternative solution to allow postal services to resume. At least 2,098 German letters had already been dispatched via the special postal service during the period covered in Figure 1. However, the measure is likely to have been limited to Beijing and Tianjin, and it is difficult draw any conclusions about other areas of China. We still do not know the solution and situation for overseas Chinese in Germany due to limitations of the sources available. The information available only indicates the Dutch Minister Beelaerts van Blokland replied in the affirmative, stating that he would immediately urge his government to implement equal treatment for overseas Chinese in Germany (MHAS 03-02-088-02-016, 16 December 1918; MHAS 03-02-088-02-021, 24 December 1918). Nevertheless, as Beelaerts van Blokland said, overseas nationals on both sides certainly suffered from worry about the safety of their families after China severed diplomatic relations with Germany (MHAS 03-02-088-02-007, 5 August 1918), even though these groups likely only made up a small proportion of the residents using the postal service.

In Pursuit of Equality in the Post-War Period

Although the Armistice after the war was agreed on 11th November 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28th June 1919, postal censorship of domestic and international communications continued after the war. This complex phenomenon was undoubtedly affected by the post-war situation, connected to the Beijing government's search for equality in their international relationships.

In July 1919, the MOC asked to recall the censors responsible for handling German letters from the Inspection Station back to their original positions. The reasons given were that the war was over, and the workload placed on the MOC headquarters was heavy, and they needed more staff to cover their responsibilities (MHAS 03-02-088-02-107, 14 July 1919; MHAS 03-02-089-03-002, 29 July 1919). The Dutch Embassy also requested that the Chinese government permit German nationals to use the postal service as usual (MHAS 03-02-088-02-119, 1 September 1919). However, the German government still censored letters sent by Chinese nationals from Germany, to prevent anyone from transporting property and money out of Germany (MHAS 03-02-088-02-114, 5 August 1919; MHAS 03-02-088-02-118, 27 August 1919). This may have been Germany's immediate response to the predicament presented by the Treaty of Versailles as signed in June, or simply an excuse to control information. Nevertheless, the actions of the Chinese side demonstrate that the Chinese government sought reciprocity in international postal service provision and censorship, as well as in diplomatic relations. In fact, as a member of the Allied powers, China took an important step toward involvement in international society during the war, and the Chinese government sought an equal status in the international society rather than regressing back to the unequal experiences from the late 19th century. As a result of a Beijing cabinet meeting, the State Council decided that German and Austrian letters and parcels that consisted solely of private belongings could be permitted to be sent by post as usual. However, they refused the request to cancel censorship of German letters until such time as the German government also withdrew their policy of examining Chinese letters (MHAS, 03-02-089-03-004, 1 October 1919).

Conclusion: The Continuation of Censorship after the War

Postal censorship in China did not end after the war, either for German residents in China or for other foreigners and Chinese citizens. On 22 September 1919, the British Minister Sir Jordan informed the Chinese government that the UK had ceased civil censorship from the beginning of July, except for the letters sent to and from some areas where military actions were ongoing. He asked China to similarly terminate censorship measures (MHAS 03-02-016-02-003, 22 July 1919). Beijing refused because they still needed to prevent the spread of internal and foreign "radicalism" (*guoji zhuyi* 過激主義), which could potentially impact public security (MHAS 03-02-016-02-006, 007, 11-16 October 1919). Meanwhile, the new Dutch Minister Oudendijk also complained that their official letters to German residents were being opened by Chinese censors (MHAS 03-02-089-03-00, 11 October 1919).

After the British Minister Sir Jordan protested again in late 1919, the Chinese cabinet decided to cancel censorship of mail directed at foreigners, with the exception of German and Austrian nationals, and non-governmental employees of Russia (MHAS 03-02-016-02-008, 21 October 1919; MHAS 03-02-016-02-011, 4 December 1919). This decision, however, did not mention China's ongoing domestic postal censorship. Moreover, its validity for foreign exemption was also questionable. At least in 1921, Dutch Minister Oudendijk still often encountered the same issue, where their official letters to German residents were being opened

and censored in Tianjin (MHAS 03-02-089-03-007), and a letter addressed to the Embassy was opened by the Xinjiang government despite diplomatic immunity (MHAS 03-02-089-04-004, 3 December 1921).

Postal censorship during and after WWI overall reflects that not only did the Chinese government regard it as a strategy to prevent information leakage during the war, but it was a useful tool in domestic policy and diplomacy. The negotiations and decisions around postal censorship and its practical operations in the early Republican era have to be seen in the context of China seeking to become a modern nation-state and be recognised as equal among the community of nations. The Beijing government made efforts to work with the Allies, to avoid international controversy, and positively respond to foreign missions' queries, but they still paid attention to equality, dignity, and the state sovereignty in their international relations. This equal treatment was even adopted in the negotiation of postal censorship as a solution to aid the resumption of postal communications between China and Germany.

For the Chinese government itself, WWI inadvertently provided an opportunity to centralise and institutionalise postal censorship. This built upon initiatives put in place by local authorities since the announcement of martial law since 1912, as Yuan Shikai attempted to attack his political opponents through the censorship apparatus (Harris, 2012: 280-282). During this process of institutionalisation, the domestic problems of the early Republican era became manifest. Beijing was not a powerful central government, while the tension often emerged between local and central authorities, as well as between 'rebels' and the pro-Beijing government. In other words, the Republic of China had never been a unified country. This was still the case by the close of the 1910s. Consequently, the domestic situation was chaotic, increasing the complexity of any implementation of postal censorship. Although Beijing tried to establish a centrally controlled censorship system, the local authorities could still use it in various ways.

In addition, the government had insufficient experience and lacked the power to organise a cross-departmental and nationwide censorship system, as necessitated by the decision to join the war. Nevertheless, Beijing still made an effort towards the institutionalisation of postal censorship. It revised the Regulations for Postal Censorship many times, adapting them to their practical experiences, and in the process, dealing with endless problems, especially issues arising from diplomatic challenges to the system. It also established a simplified process of examination for increased efficiency.

WWI had an immense influence on the postal service of China, and postal censorship ultimately impacted the efficiency of the postal service. Meanwhile, although the Beiyang government has been seen as a weak central government, the case of postal censorship shows that it was able to exercise governmental power through the CPS as a centralised national institution. Postal censorship became a way to implement the central government's will in local areas and interfere with the privacy of people's communications. To a certain extent, this was a manifestation of a modern state and the modernity of postal communication. However, the lack of privacy was probably not the most serious problem for ordinary people at that time. Instead, they felt anxious as they were unable to freely contact their families and friends far away, especially in the enemy countries. Thus, Chinese and German people alike would seek alternative methods of communication. As above mentioned, both Chinese and German nationals requested foreign missions deliver their mail through diplomatic channels. As a result of the institutionalisation of censorship during the WWI and post-war periods, the state can be said to have had a certain adverse impact on civil communication in the long term. Postal

communication has been involved in the formation of state control, as the state sought to intervene in private correspondence through the Republican era and even in contemporary China.

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