The Formation of the Deaf Community in China, 1887-1945

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Abstract

Based on memoirs, newspapers, and other historical materials, this article foregrounds National Association for the Deaf People ("中华聋哑协会") in the formation of the Chinese deaf community before and during the War of Resistance (1937-1945). In addition to the proliferation of Chinese sign language studies, this article examines the extent to which the formation of deaf-only businesses, deaf people's participation in wartime mobilization, and the proliferation of deaf education contributed to the consolidation of the deaf community in China.

Keywords: deaf history, deaf education, deafness, deaf community, China

The Formation of the Deaf Community in China, 1887-1945

In June 1937, a group of deaf Chinese people convened in Shanghai to inaugurate the first nationwide deaf organization in China, the National Association for the Deaf People ("中华聋哑协会"), which will be referenced by as "Association" hereafter (Anonymous, 1937). In Republican China, many social and political organizations, each holding different concerns, bubbled up in urban Shanghai. For example, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in 1921. Unlike the CCP, which eventually became the sole hitherto-dominant political party in Chinese society, the Association was less influential.

The current research regarding deaf history in China is dominated by the work of linguists and deaf education scholars. The first publication on this issue was contributed by the Chinese linguist Zhou Youguang (周有光) in the 1980s (Zhou, 1980, pp. 209-216). Alison Callaway's *Deaf in China* (2000) and Richard R. Lytle, Kathryn E. Johnson, and Yang Jun Hui's "Deaf Education in China" (2005) explore the roles of the Chefoo School for the Deaf and sign language in the development of deaf education in China (Callaway, 2000, p. 98; Lytle, Johnson, Yang, 2005, p. 461). Following in their footsteps, Sarah Dauncey examines deaf education as a component of "special education," Han Lin studies "the Shanghai variant of Chinese Sign Language" and its origin in deaf schools in the early twentieth century, and Mark McLeister explores the marginalization of sign language throughout the history of deaf education in China (Dauncey, 2017, pp. 290-313; Lin, 2021; McLeister, 2018, pp. 220-237). This concentration on the interwoven history of sign language and deaf education has predominated academic writings on deaf history in China.

This article supplements previous studies by examining the formation of deaf-only businesses, deaf people's participation in wartime mobilization, and the proliferation of deaf

education. Along with well-studied use of sign language, they all contributed to the consolidation of the deaf community in China. Focusing on the formation of the deaf community before and during the War of Resistance (1937-1945), this article explores the role of the Association in the evolution of the deaf community based on memoirs, newspapers, and other historical materials.

The first section of this article examines the proliferation of deaf education in early twentieth-century Chinese society. Shu Wan's article "Annetta T. Mills and the Origin of Deaf Education in China" casts light on the influence of Western missionaries on the introduction of the American pattern of deaf education into China between the 1880s and 1910s (Wan, 2021, p. 85). In the first decades of the twentieth century, an increasing number of Chinese educators in alliance with alums of Mills' school were devoted to Chinese-owned institutions of deaf education. The proliferation of private deaf schools paved the way for the formation of the Shanghai-centric deaf community. Deaf education was essential to the construction and consolidation of the emerging deaf community, characterized by the inauguration of the Association in 1937.

After examining the evolution of a loose network of deaf educators and well-educated deaf people into a national deaf community before the War of Resistance, the second section turns to the influence of the national crisis on deaf people, especially those who were impoverished and living in precarious circumstances. In 1938, the Association began to publish its official magazine titled *Yin Duo* (《喑铎》), which has as an English title, *News for the Deaf and Dumb* [sic]. Its editors and contributors were well-educated deaf people. To inform the deaf audience of the newest happenings in their community, the magazine's content ranges from coverage of deaf events and everyday life to deaf people's artworks and controversial issues in their community. Reviewing its initial issues between

1938 and 1939, this section argues that well-educated deaf people were foremost concerned with providing education and accommodation for deaf refugee children, saving poor deaf people from economic hardship, and displaying their talents in fine art. Overall, well-educated deaf people attempted to help the impoverished members of their community, which led to a "deaf-help-deaf" culture.

A National Network of Deaf Schools

For the modern Chinese nation, deaf education is not considered an indigenous practice but rather something imported from the West in the late nineteenth century. In 1887, American female missionary Annetta T. Mills founded the first deaf school in Chefoo, which encouraged the proliferation of deaf education in China during the following decades (Wan, 2021, p. 93). Most of the deaf educators in China maintained direct or indirect connections with Mills' school for the deaf. Concerned with the proliferation of deaf education accompanied by the expansion of its network, this section examines the early history of the deaf community in China between the foundation of Mills' school in Chefoo and the inauguration of the Association in 1937.

Mills' success encouraged the Chinese to dedicate themselves to developing deaf education. Zhou Yaoxian (周耀先), the parent of two deaf children, launched the first Chinese-owned deaf school, the Shiruiting (石瑞亭) Deaf School, in Hangzhou. Zhou's early life is unclear and not well-documented, but his contribution to deaf education was recorded in local gazettes. According to the *Gazetteer of Education in the Zhejiang Province*, "in 1914, the private Zhejiang Christian College's faculty member Zhou (whose surname was also spelled as Tse in some historical records) launched a deaf school in Shiruiting in Hangzhou. It was sustained for over a year but closed because of Zhou's death" (Yu, 2004, p. 449).

Within this school's short life, Zhou's enterprise conveyed the important influence of the Chefoo School for the Deaf on the formation of deaf education in China. The school's teachers consisted of graduates of Mills' School, including his son, Zhou Tianfu (周天孚) Wan, 2001, p. 94). Mills' and Zhou's schools were interconnected in the network of deaf education.

Zhou's school was revived after receiving external financial support in the 1920s. In 1922, the China Christian Independent Church's (CCIC) leading pastor, Yu Guozhen (俞国桢), announced a plan to build a new Puhui Deaf School. Under his leadership, the CCIC was one of the most influential indigenous churches in 1920s China, which "had over 100 member churches, an annual national meeting, and full bylaws, in addition to its own newspaper" (Bays, 1991, p. 310). Claiming to continue Zhou's passion for promoting deaf education in China, Yu moved the school to Shanghai and hired Zhou Tianfu as a staff member in the new school (Anonymous, 1992, p. 9). In light of Zhou's experience in the two Chinese-owned deaf schools, the Chefoo School for the Deaf also played an important role in expanding the network of deaf education.

Zhou's and Yu's schools were not the only two institutions in the Chefoo-centric network of deaf education. The Qunxue Society (群学会)-affiliated Deaf School in Shanghai offered an example. Unlike the Chefoo School for the Deaf and its offspring institutions organized and supervised by deaf people and/or educators, the Qunxue Society was founded during the proliferation of study societies in late Qing China. Unlike those organizations, which featured intense participation in political activism leading to the 1911 Revolution, the Qunxue Society was constantly concerned with promoting modern education to enlighten ordinary people, including those with hearing impairments. In 1920, the Society launched its

affiliated deaf school (Sun, 1997, p. 853). Its maintenance relied on funds raised from the civil society in Shanghai and personnel trained in the Chefoo School for the Deaf.

Aside from pastor Yu and the Qunxue Society, many individuals and institutions took an interest in supporting deaf education. According to a journalist's survey in 1939, there were thirteen deaf schools in China at that time, of which three were located in Shanghai. Among the remaining ten schools, four of them were located in cities near Shanghai, including Nanjing, Nantong, Hanxian, and Wuxian. Most of them were financially supported by successful entrepreneurs and charitable organizations instead of the municipal or national governments (Anonymous, 1939).

Despite the absence of the public sector's support for the proliferation of deaf schools, Qing and early Republican bureaucrats were not ignorant of its progress. In the early history of the Chefoo School for the Deaf, local officials expressed their passion for developing deaf education. The provincial governor in Shandong visited Mills' school, watched her "miracle" in educating deaf children, and donated to the enterprise personally (Wan, 2001, p. 93). Parallel to this local bureaucrat's eagerness to encourage Mills' enterprise in Shandong, officials in the remaining parts of China also advocated for the development of deaf education. In 1903, a local official in Guangdong, Wang Junhe, "proposed to build a blind-mute school ... enrolling crippled children and youth" (Anonymous,1903). Three years later, the influential Chinese politician-entrepreneur, Zhang Jian (张謇), visited the blind-and-deaf school in Kyoto. He became aware of the value of deaf education, which motivated him to take a petition to Emperor Guangxu (Zhang, 2016, p. 29). In his letter, Zhang articulated the importance of founding deaf education to promote the modernization of Chinese society (Liu & Zhang, 1992, p. 51). However, both Wang's and Zhang's proposals did not receive support from the Qing court.

Considering their association of deaf education with the modernization of Chinese society, the official support for deaf education should be situated in the New Policies reform from the last decade of Qing China. Reacting to the exacerbated national crisis after the Boxer Protocol in 1901, the Qing court changed its conservative stance toward a modernizing Chinese polity and society. According to Kristin Stapleton, "the New Policies reform launched in the final decade of Qing rule reflected the concern about national strength" (Stapleton, 2000, p. 4). As an important component of the agenda for enhancing China's national strength, the old Confucianism-centric and civil service exam-embedded educational system was gradually replaced by the new school system. Modern school education covered the marginalized population such as "deaf people [who] were excluded from the traditional school system in China" (Yuling, 1932). A similar observation motivated Mills' self-dedication to the education of deaf Chinese people in Chefoo.

Long before the inauguration of Mills' school in Chefoo, the Chinese had an opportunity to obtain first-hand knowledge of American deaf education in the 1840s. Before his active participation in the Self-strengthening Movement in the 1870s, the Chinese Yale alumnus Yung Wing stayed in the house of William Gallaudet, the latter of whom presided over the National Deaf-Mute College, which later evolved into Gallaudet University. However, there was no evidence that Yung discussed any subject with the host regarding the development of deaf education in America (Wan, 2021, p. 87).

When New Policies reformers visited Japan in the 1900s, these successors of Yung documented their strong impression of Japanese deaf education. As the member of the delegation, Yang Fei (杨芾), recorded in his diary, "(I), Zhong Fan, and Mian Hai went to the blind-and-deaf school in Koishikawa (in Tokyo) ... those deaf and blind students study together in the same classroom.… After studying in the school for several years, those deaf

and blind children could learn skills for survival, which is a benevolent policy" (Yang, 2014, p.46). Aside from Yang Fei, other late Qing officials visited the blind-and-deaf school in Tokyo and similarly returned with a strong impression of the advancement of deaf education in Japan (Lü, 1999, p. 78). Their encounters with the Japanese pattern of blind-and-deaf education profoundly influenced the direction of deaf education in China. In 1905, the Qing court publicized its reform plan for the “new school system,” which combined deaf and blind education in building blind-and-deaf schools instead of the American deaf-only pattern introduced by Mills.

The distinction between Japanese and American patterns could be traced back to the different origins of deaf education in the two nations. In the United States, the pedagogy and practices of deaf education originated in France. According to R. A. R. Edwards, "in the antebellum period, the bilingual-bicultural approach to deaf education became the common standard of deaf education and was in fact the American innovation in a system of education largely imported here from France” (Edwards, 2012, p.3). By contrast, the origin of deaf education in Japan was complex. Following the U.S. Navy officer Commodore Matthew C. Perry’s "arrival of the Black Ship" at Kanagawa harbor in 1853, the appearance of deaf education in Japan was associated with the Europeans. According to a report in *The Association Review*, “On May 22nd, 1875 ... at the house of Dr. Fauld, an English physician of Tokyo … Dr. Burchardt, a German-American Lutheran missionary, formed an Association for furthering the instruction of the blind. On May 26th, 1884, the school was thrown open to the deaf people, and its name was changed accordingly” (Anonymous, 1900, p. 190). Attributed to those advocates' German and British backgrounds, the pattern of combining blind and deaf education became prevalent in late-nineteenth-century Japanese society.

Reacting to Chinese intellectuals’ and officials' eagerness to follow the Japanese

pattern, Japanese deaf educators also contributed their ideas to the heated dialogue about developing deaf education in China. In 1912, the president of the Blind-and-Deaf School in Tokyo, Nobuhachi Konishi, published an article in Chinese to introduce the past and progress of deaf education in Japan. Besides telling the founding story of deaf education characterized by the collaboration between Japanese people and Western missionaries, Konishi ended his writing with the suggestion of developing a Chinese-owned enterprise of deaf education. "(You may) consider sending Chinese blind and mute students to study in Japan or hiring graduates of deaf and mute schools in Japan, who are versatile and skilled as teachers to work in China" (Konishi, 1912, 15). Following Konishi's suggestion, a few of the Chinese graduates from Japanese blind-and-deaf schools returned to China and worked as teachers in the Jinzhou Blind-and-Deaf school founded in 1932 (Anonymous, 2001, p. 176). Parallel to Mills' introduction of the American pattern of deaf education into Chinese society, the Japanese pattern of combining blind and deaf education influenced the progress of deaf education and its expanding network in China.

Despite the coexistence of the Japanese and American patterns in the early history of deaf education in China, their shared trait – reliance on government sponsorship – rarely affected their Chinese counterparts. Both the Qing and Republican governments did not place a high priority on deaf education in their budget. Until the War of Resistance in 1937, the only public deaf school was located in the capital city, Nanjing. Meanwhile, private deaf schools received limited state funds. For example, the Beijing Deaf School was entrenched in economic hardship in the 1930s. Before the War of Resistance, the school received a small number of subsidies. "The Hebei province government appropriated 200 yuan every month, and the Social Security Bureau in Beijing provided 30 yuan each month" (Anonymous, 1934, p. 48). In sum, the provincial and municipal governments could offer 2760 yuan to the school

each year. This amount was insufficient for the maintenance of the school, which required 7000 yuan a year (Anonymous, 1934, p. 48). The deficit mainly relied on enrollees' tuition and donations from civil society.

The influence of economic hardship on deaf education in China was prominently embodied in the trajectory of Zhang Jian's enterprise. As mentioned above, Zhang attempted to convince the Qing rulers of the importance of deaf education but failed. This frustration did not discourage his passion for educating deaf and blind children in China. After a few years of arrangement and fund-raising activities, Zhang was determined to build a deaf school in 1916 (Anonymous, 2000, p. 176). In tandem with other private deaf schools in China, the maintenance of Zhang's school mainly relied on the profit of his business Dah Sun Cotton Mill, which was one of the largest textile factories in early twentieth-century East Asia. Despite Zhang's implementation of the Japanese pattern of building a blind-and-deaf school, his enterprise also benefited from graduates of the Chefoo School for the Deaf. However, when Zhang's business encountered a deficit in the 1920s, he failed to seek financial aid from the local and national governments in support of his enterprise. Thanks to his reputation in Chinese calligraphy, Zhang was able to sell his artworks to fund his blind-and-deaf school (Liu & Zhang, 1992, p. 17).

However, the outbreak of the War of Resistance in 1937 disrupted the development of deaf education but prompted the emergence of the deaf community. On April 1st, 1936, well-educated deaf people "in Nanjing, Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, Shandong, and Sichuan" convened in the Xinshijie Restaurant in Shanghai. They discussed arranging the first national deaf organization in China (Anonymous, 1936). Following the inauguration of the Association in 1937, its leaders took their endeavor to strengthen the connection among nodes on the deaf education network and other deaf poor people who were unable to access

education and were consequently excluded from the "network." As shown in the subsequent section, the Association's agenda successfully consolidated the deaf community in wartime China.

Focusing on the early history of Chinese-owned deaf education, this section discusses the frustration and financial difficulties that well-educated deaf people encountered in their dedication to deaf education. Attributed to a shortage of governmental appropriation, those advocates had to seek financial support from local society. It rendered Shanghai – the city characterized by the largest civil society in early twentieth-century China – the center of deaf education. Confronting a set of challenges, they still successfully promoted the proliferation of deaf schools, accompanied by the extension of its network between 1914 and 1937.

Despite the coexistence of the Japanese deaf-blind and American deaf-only patterns, Chefoo School for the Deaf played an important role in the promising growth of deaf education in China. This school's alumni were employed in various Chinese-owned deaf schools, which blurred the line between the different patterns of deaf education. Furthermore, the school offered a "common ground" for the consolidated network of deaf schools. Their affiliates became the major force in the emerging deaf community in 1936. The following section switches to well-educated deaf people and their efforts to strengthen the connection between the deaf people of different backgrounds.

Forging a Wartime Deaf Community

1937 was a vital year in modern Chinese history, being the first year of the War of Resistance and the Japanese military's occupation of China's capital Nanjing. This was followed by the catastrophic Nanjing Massacre in December. In the same year, a group of well-educated deaf people convened in Shanghai for the inauguration of the Association in

June. Its inaugural chair announced the plan of action, including "building a wartime deaf school for refugee children," "seeking a solution to deaf people's unemployment," "arranging an art exhibition of deaf artists' works," and "undertaking a national survey of deaf people's general condition' (Anonymous, 1937). Concerned with the Association's mission of advocating the interest and well-being of deaf people in China, this section illustrates the wartime transition from a loose network of deaf education to a concentrated deaf community between 1938 and 1945.

One month after the inauguration of the Association in Shanghai, the War of Resistance burst out, during which time the Japanese military assaulted the Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing on July 7. As a consequence of its weaker military power in comparison with the invading force, the Chinese national government lost control of several major cities on its East Coast. Before the end of this war's first year, Shanghai and the capital city Nanjing fell to the Japanese military's occupation. The exacerbated national crisis unavoidably affected the progress of deaf education. For example, Fu Ya School (福哑学校)became at risk of bankruptcy. As reported in *Shen Bao* (《申报》) at the time of occupation, "owing to the outbreak of the War of Resistance in the mid-year (of 1937), the (Fu Ya School's) fund-raising activities (for its maintenance) were entirely interrupted. Moreover, because the campus was located in the battleground, the operation of the school was impacted" (Anonymous, 1943). When relocating to the International Settlement in Shanghai, "all deaf education-related devices and facilities were damaged by the war" (Anonymous, 1943). Other deaf schools in Shanghai and its nearby regions were also profoundly impacted during the war. For example, the only public deaf school in Nanjing was relocated to the wartime capital Chongqing until 1945. Along with the relocation of the public deaf school and its affiliates to the Great Home Front, the Association reached out to Southwest China. In

1939, many well-educated deaf people relocated to Sichuan, and seeing that there were already deaf living there, they "sent a request (to the Association's leaders) for building a branch there" (Anonymous, 1939).

However, the closure of these deaf schools affected their enrollees' access to deaf education. After all, many, including both deaf and hearing people, could not relocate to the Great Home Front in Southwest China. Among those people who were reluctant or unable to depart the East Coast, some of the Association's leaders and active members left for Shanghai, the wartime "lonely island." As mentioned above, most parts of Shanghai had been occupied by the Japanese military before the end of November 1937. However, the territories in the International Settlement under French, American, and British control took exception and exemption from the occupation until the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. The special status of Shanghai sheltered domestic and international refugees, including the deaf Chinese people, during wartime. Taking Sun Zuhui (孙祖惠) as an example, "after Hangzhou fell to the Japanese military's occupation, he and his family ... relocated, via Shanxing and Ningbo, to Shanghai" (Anonymous, 1938). Likewise, another deaf person began his memoir essay by documenting his journey to Shanghai as a refugee. As quoted in a deaf person's remark in *Yin Duo,* "after the Japanese military assaulted Zhejiang province, the best part of the Western Zhejiang almost all fell to its occupation. I had to relocate to different places frequently" (Anonymous, 1938). Witnessing the damage done to deaf education by military conflict, well-educated deaf people made all efforts to arrange a wartime school. After raising adequate funds and finding a locale for the campus, the Association's leadership succeeded in building the wartime school in late 1938. A couple of active members of the Association, including Lin Jimu (林吉姆), took charge of teaching in the school, which enrolled over ten students (Anonymous, 1938). The wartime school, which then changed its name to the

Association's affiliated school, successfully sheltered those deprived children as war refugees.

Moreover, the deaf Chinese people remained unemployed in large numbers. Before the War of Resistance, unemployment partially tied to the Great Depression was a severe problem in China (Mitter, 2010, p. 100). The situation could be significantly worse for the deaf people. According to a deaf person's testimony, "my efforts to seek survival and to find a job for a few years led to disappointment" (Anonymous, 1937). In the wartime environment, the deteriorated job market hindered deaf people's entrance into occupations. Consequently, "when a deaf and mute person takes their first step to be integrated into hearing society, he would like to seek a 'rice bowl' in competition with the large army of the unemployed, which is not easy at all" (Anonymous, 1938). The frustration deaf people encountered in wartime was prominently embodied in Lin Jimu's experience. As mentioned above, Jimu served as a teacher in the wartime deaf school. However, his services in the school were terminated when its precarious financial situation worsened in the 1940s; he finally became homeless in 1941 (Anonymous, 1941). Eventually, information about his later life disappeared from historical records. Lin's experience was not alone but represented many deaf people's encounters with the wartime crisis. In Shanghai, many deaf people became homeless and were forced to shelter in the Association's office. For those whose livelihood was at risk, "the Association intended to introduce them to refugee asylums, which could harbor them from vagrancy" (Anonymous, 1938). However, this temporary measure could not entirely solve the unemployment affecting poor deaf people.

Unlike those degraded to the status of war refugees, the majority of the Association's leadership and active members were exempted from economic hardship. These members typically benefited significantly from their wealthy families. As [He] Yuling (何玉麟) noted,

"those wealthy deaf-mute children's father and older brother may send them to school for education or invite tutors to teach them at home" (Yuling, 1932). As mentioned above, the founder of the first Chinese-owned deaf school, Zhou, hired his deaf sons as teachers. Likewise, some wealthy deaf people worked in their families' businesses. As for well-educated deaf people employed by the non-family-owned business, their employment was attributed to their education. However, "except those residing in big cities who may have more education opportunities, most of the deaf children in the lower class wasted their time in vain" (Yuling, 1932). As mentioned above, the pre-1937 network of deaf people consisted of deaf schoolteachers and alumni but excluded "uneducated" deaf people who were often unemployed. In mid-1938, it was reported an increasing number of unemployed deaf "came to the Association and asked for charitable aid" (Anonymous, 1939). Encountering exacerbated unemployment among poor deaf people, the Association's leadership opened their business "Zhi Yong Fine Art Cooperative." It aimed to "solve the unemployment issue" by only hiring poor deaf people (Anonymous, 1939, p. 5). Despite this cooperative's similarity to the tradition of poorhouses in the West, its spontaneity and self-sufficiency – being managed by well-educated deaf people and providing work opportunities to their poor counterparts – distinguished them from those government-run charitable enterprises.

Besides building the "deaf-help-deaf" culture in forging the deaf community, the Association also arranged a fine art exhibition to display deaf artists' talents. This choice of fine art as the exhibition's theme was attributed to the fact that occupations of most well-educated deaf people were predominantly related to painting (Anonymous, 1939, 13). Their preference originated in Mills' School. When she introduced the American pattern of deaf education into China, Mills highlighted the integration of deaf children into mainstream society through vocational training (Wan, 2021, p. 95). Chinese-owned deaf schools

"inherited" the tradition. However, unlike the emphasis on the skills of printing and weaving in Mills' school, those Chinese-supervised deaf schools paid attention to arts education. According to a deaf student in Hangzhou, "[my deaf school's] curriculum mainly consists of those art-related subjects, including calligraphy and painting … students also take an interest in these subjects. So, their achievements in fine arts are superior to [hearing] students in other schools" (Anonymous, 1936). This youth was not alone in the desire to study fine arts. A large proportion of the Fu Ya School's placement for graduates was in fine-arts-related professions (Anonymous, 1943). For those deaf artists, the exhibition of their artworks could showcase their talents.

During their preparation for the exhibition, the Association's leadership took advantage of the network of deaf education by contacting deaf artists and collecting their artworks. The deaf people in "the Beiping Private Deaf-Dumb [sic] School, Jinzhou Deaf-Dumb School, Yantai [Chefoo] Deaf-dumb school, the Association's affiliated Deaf-dumb School, Shanghai Fu-ya School, and some famous artists" contributed their works (Anonymous, 1939). In light of multiple deaf schools' active participation in its preparation, the exhibition exposes the Association's achievement in facilitating a scattered deaf network into a closely connected deaf community. In the meantime, a group of deaf people in Tianjin succeeded in arranging a five-day exhibition of "deaf calligraphy and paintings" in July 1938 (Zude, 1938, p.5). The deaf cohort in Tianjin was well-known inside the national deaf community for their social activism and for bridging between deaf people and hearing society. Their exhibition reportedly attracted over 200 visitors daily, mainly young students (Zude, 1938, p. 5). Income from tickets helped relieve the Tianjin deaf community's financial stress; the regional deaf exhibition also fostered the Association leadership's determination to accelerate their steps in arranging the exhibition of the deaf Chinese people's artworks and

achievements. Ultimately, thanks to the collaboration between well-educated deaf people in Shanghai and their colleagues across China, the two-day exhibition was very successful. Despite being held during wartime, it still attracted over 1000 guests in January 1939 (Anonymous, 1939). Contrary to prevalent perception of deaf people as somehow a burden on hearing people, deaf people's talents in fine art displayed their "usefulness" during the national crisis.

Parallel to their efforts to demonstrate deaf people's potential to become brilliant artists, the Association's leadership also raised funds to support their national military on the front of the War of Resistance. In October 1939, they succeeded in "raising 32 silk-cotton vests and donating them to soldiers on the front," as well as "deploying Association's members Lin Jimu and Zhang Yiwan" in providing voluntary service to the Chinese military in defense of the Chinese nation (Anonymous, 1937). In alliance with their hearing compatriots in confronting the national crisis, well-educated deaf people succeeded in demonstrating their capacity for saving not only their fellow deaf people but also the Chinese nation.

The last project listed on the Association's agenda was to conduct a national survey of the deaf population in China. For a long time, the concrete statistics of the deaf Chinese population and their demographic distribution remained a puzzle. Based on the percentage of deaf people who were taken into the general population of the United States, Mills estimated that "there are nearly four hundred thousand deaf people in that great empire, almost as many as there are in all the rest of the world" in 1905 (Mills, 1905, p. 458). Despite their inaccuracy, statistics were frequently referenced by Chinese hearing and deaf in reasoning about the severity of deafness in China later on. For example, Yuling stated that "assuming our country has four hundred million people, I may estimate there are at least four hundred

thousand deaf people in China, which is a striking number" (Yuling, 1932). Likewise, the statistics were referenced with modification in Dai Shishi's (戴师石) speech at the inauguration of the Association. "According to the survey across the world, deaf people take around one-thousandth of the general population. In light of China's worse sanitation than Western countries, we suppose there are four hundred and fifty thousand deaf people in the nation" (Anonymous. 1937). Not satisfied with the accuracy of Mills' estimate, the Association's leaders were motivated to conduct a national survey of deaf people's demographic distribution and living situations in China. They planned to "report the collected and sorted statistics to the government to facilitate its plan for providing charities to deaf people" (Anonymous, 1939, p. 4). However, this project encountered frustration and roadblocks in the wartime environment.

Despite its purpose of providing statistics for the national government's reference, the undertaking of the survey still relied primarily on deaf people's spontaneous efforts. Thanks to the proliferation of deaf education and the expansion of its network, the leadership of the Association could collaborate with its nodes, deaf schools across China, to undertake the survey. Multiple deaf schools and their teachers took active roles in contacting other deaf persons in their regions and collecting information from them (Anonymous, 1939, p. 11).

Unfortunately, the extended and exacerbated national crisis hindered this projects' progress. The Association suspended the project in late 1939. According to its announcement, "owing to the political tumults in the War of Resistance, so our Association decided to, after the war, continue to conduct a nationwide survey and to reach out to" poor deaf people in rural areas (Anonymous. 1939, p. 4). Despite the difficulty in the wartime environment, the Association still made significant progress on the project. Before the suspension of the survey, 1000 copies of questionnaires were sent out, and over 960 answers were returned.

The Association's active member Yu Weng took charge of analyzing the statistics. He reported his initial conclusion: most deaf people were unemployed, and these unemployed deaf people were predominantly uneducated (Anonymous, 1939, p. 12). The result resonated with the Association's mission to create a cross-class deaf community, which motivated their further engagement in helping poor deaf people.

The Association played an essential role in blurring class lines inside the deaf community. During the national crisis, well-educated deaf people made efforts to provide "poor relief" to their impoverished counterparts, transforming the well-educated deaf-centric network into an inclusive deaf community. With an intense concentration on facilitating the employment of deaf individuals and their community's self-sufficiency, the Association's leadership forged a national deaf community.

Conclusion

This article primarily reviews the early history of deaf education and the formation of the deaf community in early-twentieth-century Chinese society. The War of Resistance catalyzed the creation of a cross-class alliance between well-educated deaf people and their poor counterparts. The leaders of the deaf community in China prioritized reform for the community's poor members and their integration into hearing society.

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