

The Bibliothèque Sino-Internationale and the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, 1933-1939

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In 1933, the Bibliothèque Sino-Internationale (BSI) was established in Geneva, Switzerland, as China's direct response to the mandates of the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation (ICIC). This paper explores the successful implantation of Intellectual Cooperation in both Europe and the Republic of China (ROC) through the study of the BSI with an emphasis on visual culture and Sino-European exchange. This approach measures the extent to which BSI's collection of art, photography, print and film media reshaped the institution of the library as an alternative space for diplomacy and a critical platform for the diffusion of Chinese culture internationally, particularly in the years following Japan's increasingly aggressive cultural diplomacy to justify the invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

The intertwined history and destinies of the BSI and the ICIC begin with the ICIC serving as a strategic platform for China to seek international guidance for modernizing education. At the Twelfth Session of the ICIC in August 1930, philosopher and linguist Wu Jingheng (or Wu Zhi-Hui, 1865-1953), was approved to represent China at the ICIC⁴¹ and would later become one of four co-founders of the BSI. Then, the formation of the Chinese National Committee on Intellectual Co-operation (CNCIC) led to the League of Nations' Mission of Educational Experts to China in 1931.⁴² The five experts on this team was appointed by the executive arm of the ICIC, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC), to submit recommendations for reorganizing of public education in China. Among them was BSI co-founder Carl H. Becker (1876-1933),⁴³ Prussia's former Minister of Education. Another co-founder of the BSI and participant in the ICIC was the French-educated biologist, Nationalist Party activist, and education reformer Li Yu-Ying (Li Shih-Tseng, 1881-1973). Not only was Li a confidante of Wu, he also represented Wu at several ICIC meetings in Geneva and was a close friend of another BSI co-founder, the French socialist politician Edouard Herriot (1872-1957), who was an early champion of the League of Nations and a General Assembly Delegate representing France.⁴⁴

In addition to the formidable profiles of BSI's founding members who were longtime defenders of the League of Nations, the BSI secured the political and financial backing of the Nationalist government to support its Geneva branch operations which were remarkably expansive in scale. During the BSI's most active period from 1934 through 1936, the BSI enterprise consisted of three locations in Geneva alone. There was a center for Chinese language instruction, a printing facility for the reproduction of artworks and publication of texts in both Chinese and non-Chinese editions, and a grand library with administrative offices at the Château Montalègre⁴⁵ located preeminently near the League of Nations and the International Labour Office (ILO). One of the most salient characteristics of the BSI is that the institution featured a "museum"⁴⁶ following its move in October 1937 to quarters formerly housing the Disarmament

⁴¹ League of Nations, "Appointment of Two New Members to the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation: Report by the French Representative," Geneva, 12 May 1930, LNA: R2219.

⁴² Li Chang, *International Cooperation in China: A Study of the Role of the League of Nations, 1919-1946* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1999), 50.

⁴³ *Zhongguo Guoji Tushuguan Gaiyao*, Shanghai, 1934.

⁴⁴ "Edouard Herriot," League of Nations Search Engine, University of Heidelberg, <http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/4353> (accessed November 10, 2021).

⁴⁵ *Bibliothèque Sino-Internationale Genève*, 2nd edition (Geneva: Imprimerie et Editions Union, 1936), 20-22.

⁴⁶ "Geneva's Bibliotheque Sino-Internationale," *The China Critic* XXV.13 (29 June 1939): 199.

Commission, thereby enhancing the power and perception of place in the library and with the European public.⁴⁷ In China, the BSI Shanghai branch was officially launched in 1934,⁴⁸ although it was already open to the public as early as 1932.⁴⁹ The BSI continued its many functions as a library, arts and cultural center even during the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), WWII, and Chinese Civil War (1945-1949). However, after Switzerland's diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1950, Li moved the BSI from Geneva to Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1951. Three decades later, negotiations between the foreign ministers of Taiwan and Uruguay ensued, resulting in the shipment of select contents including rare books, paintings, photographs, posters, films, and ephemera of the BSI to their current location at the National Central Library (NCL) in Taiwan in 1993.

The BSI constitutes a fascinating case study to explore how the ICIC served as a catalyst for the creation of the BSI franchise at a decisive moment during the interwar period. The relationship between the ICIC and the BSI thus presents a framework to re-evaluate the potentiality of the library as a distinctly hybrid institution of sinology, culture, and international affairs. Furthermore, the BSI collection of visual materials demonstrates how BSI worked closely with the ICIC to pursue intellectual cooperation as part of government policy for China's national reconstruction and to showcase these efforts for the member states of the League of Nations and the European public. The activities and events curated around these materials at the BSI as exemplified by exhibitions of Chinese paintings, calligraphy, photography, children's art, and film screenings underscore China's intent to engage with the world and inform the West of her plight in context of Japanese occupation and war.

In addition to the BSI collection at the NCL, this paper includes research of primary documents from the Archives of the ROC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Institute of Modern History of Academia Sinica, Academia Historica, the "Private Papers" of Wu Zhi-Hui and Li Yu-Ying at the Kuomintang Party Archives, the Ministry of Education and Li Yu-Ying documents at the National Archives Administration, and the oral history interviews of former Ambassador to France and Uruguay, Tchen Hiong-Fei (1911-2004) at the Archives of Academia Sinica. The UNESCO Archives AtoM Catalogue, United Nations Archives Geneva, the League of National Search Engine of the University of Heidelberg, and the BSI Archives at Biblioteca Nacional de Uruguay were also consulted.

This paper argues that the BSI collection of artworks, posters, photographs, and films represent a specific body of visual source materials that were collected or commissioned for the purpose to support China's endeavors as a member of the ICIC and the League of Nations. This paper also contends that the primary objective of China's intellectual cooperation is to introduce China and Chinese culture to the international community rather than within the ideological confines of the West. That there is a dearth of published research on the BSI, let alone on its visual source materials,⁵⁰ necessitates a nuanced examination of the BSI's history in context of the ICIC as part of a collaborative network of intellectuals and institutions in both Europe and China during the interwar period.

⁴⁷ Tianshi Hu, "Zhongguo guoji tushuguan yu kangzhan," *Zhonghua Tushuguan Xiehui Huibao* 14, no. 4 (1940), 5.

⁴⁸ *Bibliothèque Sino-Internationale Genève*, 2nd edition, 16.

⁴⁹ Takashi Saikawa, "From Intellectual Cooperation to International Cultural Exchange: Japan and China in the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation," PhD diss., University of Heidelberg, 2014.

⁵⁰ *Cat'alogo de los libros chinos antiguos de la Biblioteca Sino-Internacional* (Taipei: National Central Library, 1984).