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Seeds of Failure: The Shanghai Young Men's Christian Association During the May Fourth Movement

In June 1919, amidst the fervor of the May Fourth Movement, a contentious letter titled 'THE Y.M.C.A. AND A CRITIC' was published in the *North China Daily News*, sparking debate over the Shanghai Young Men's Christian Association's (YMCA) political engagement.¹ Claiming to be a missionary, the author condemned the Shanghai Young Men's Christian Association for its "illegal attempt" to participate in the anti-Japanese boycott movement. The author argued that what the Shanghai YMCA had done was "dragging that world-wide symbol in the mud" and that it ought to "drop the word 'Christian' from its title" for the sake of "common fairness."² This incident underscores a pivotal moment for the YMCA in Shanghai, revealing the complex interplay between its religious mission and the political upheaval of the era. The May Fourth Movement, a watershed in Chinese history, marked a national awakening and reevaluation of China's place in the world, challenging institutions like the YMCA to navigate their roles within this shifting landscape. This paper will explore how the Shanghai YMCA's response to these tumultuous times precipitated its decline, as it was caught between the expectations of its international Christian community and the burgeoning nationalist sentiments of the Chinese public.

¹ A Missionary, "THE Y.M.C.A. AND A CRITIC," *The North - China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870-1941)*, Jun 21, 1919.
<https://login.proxy048.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/y-m-c-critic/docview/1369943455/se-2>.

² A Missionary, "THE Y.M.C.A. AND A CRITIC."

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) is a worldwide youth organization aiming to put Christian values into practice.³ It was first established in Britain in 1844 and rapidly expanded to Europe and North America within a decade. By the end of the nineteenth century, the YMCA had spread to various parts of China, leading to the establishment of several city-level associations. The YMCA successfully landed in China because its missions met the needs of Chinese society in the late Qing Dynasty. Its novel approach to cultivating the "body, mind, and spirit" of youth was in line with a series of social movements that were taking place in the late Qing, including the Self-Strengthening Movement (1860s-1890s), the Reform Movement of 1898, and the Revolution of 1911. Although their approaches were different, those movements shared a similar aim, which was to build a strong, modern state by reforming Chinese society at various levels. Hoping to reform Chinese society, the Chinese gentry was especially attracted to the YMCA's emphasis on social services and the effective organizational structure underlying it.⁴

The Shanghai YMCA was established in 1900. As one of the first cities to have a YMCA, Shanghai was designated the organization's headquarters in 1911. Initially, the leadership team was headed by American John R. Mott and mainly composed of Americans, with few Chinese leaders. However, this began to change after Mott returned to the United States in 1915 and Wang Zhengting became General Secretary. The U.S. members of the board welcomed a growing Chinese leadership as they believed in cultivating outstanding Christian leaders in China.⁵ By the year 1919, the number of senior Chinese leaders had surpassed their American counterparts. Yu Rizhang was the General Secretary of the Chinese YMCA at the state-level, and

³ "YMCA History - YMCA International - World Alliance of Ymcas."
<https://www.ymca.int/about-us/ymca-history/>

⁴ Yan Huiqing 颜惠庆, *Yan huiqing Zizhuan: yiwei minguo yuanlao de lishi jiyi* 颜惠庆自传:一位民国元老的历史记忆 [Autobiography of Yan Huiqing: Historical Memory of a Republic of China Veteran] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2003), 46-7.

⁵ George A. Fitch, "George A. Fitch, General Secretary, Young Men's Christian Association, Shanghai, China. Annual Report for the year ending Sept. 30, 1917," in University of Minnesota Libraries, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, 3.

George A. Fitch was the General Secretary of the Shanghai YMCA at the city-level.⁶ Both of these organizations developed rapidly at the beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, from 1905 to 1919, membership in the Shanghai YMCA increased from 269 to 3391.⁷ In addition, the Shanghai YMCA, which initially depended on funding from the North American YMCA, received increasing domestic sponsorship. In the year 1919, the Shanghai YMCA raised \$250,000 in domestic sponsorship for the United War Work Campaign.⁸ By the time the May Fourth Movement started, the domestic sponsorship of the YMCA greatly exceeded overseas support from North America.⁹

The May Fourth Movement, one of many political movements that happened at the turn of the twentieth century, grew out of student demonstrations in Beijing on May 4, 1919, which sparked nationwide protests and spurred an upsurge in Chinese nationalism. Shanghai quickly joined the demonstrations, protesting the Chinese government's weak response to the Treaty of Versailles. This Treaty allowed Japan to retain territories in Shandong province that had been surrendered by Germany after the Siege of Qingdao in 1914. The Chinese public viewed the Shanghai YMCA as a well-developed and resourceful organization and therefore expected it to join in the preparation and planning of the movement. At the same time, the international Christian community also kept its eyes on the Shanghai YMCA and was sensitive to its politicization, exemplified by the anonymous letter sent to the *North China Daily News*. Previous scholarship on the Republican era's Shanghai YMCA seldom discusses the tensions between the

⁶ Yuan Fanglai 袁访赉, *Yu Rizhang Zhuan* 余日章传 [Biography of Yu Rizhang] (Hong Kong: Jidujiao wenyi chubanshe, 1970), 42.

⁷ Shanghai Association, "Chinese Y.M.C.A. Shanghai, Quarterly Report, June 30th-Sept. 30th, 1905," University of Minnesota Libraries, Kautz Family YMCA Archives; Chen Yiai 陈以爱, *Dongyuan de lilian: Shanghai xuechao de qiyuan* 动员的力量: 上海学潮的起源 [The Power of Mobilization: Origins of the Shanghai Student Movement] (Hong Kong: Kaiyuan shuju chuban youxian gongsi, 2021), 530.

⁸ George A. Fitch, "Annual Report Letter of G. A. Fitch, Acting Association General Secretary, Young Men's Christian Association, Shanghai, China, for the year ending Sept. 30, 1919," University of Minnesota Libraries, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, 1.

⁹ Chen, 164.

Chinese public and the international Christian community.¹⁰ Scholars who have analyzed both sides of this issue have tended to focus more on the YMCA in relation to the anti-Christian movement that arose in 1922.¹¹ They claim that the Shanghai YMCA experienced its heyday during the May Fourth Movement, though tensions with other organizations existed but were largely dismissed.

Challenging existing scholarship, this paper argues that the crisis that stifled the Shanghai YMCA in the 1920s and 1930s had already emerged during the May Fourth period. After two decades of development, the Shanghai YMCA had developed considerable power and influence, causing its every move to attract the attention of various forces. This made it adopt a moderate strategy when facing the radical student protests in the hope of stabilizing the organization's position. Thus, the Shanghai YMCA, primarily made up of young Chinese students and led by Chinese individuals, did not fully engage in the May Fourth Movement. As a result, many of its members left to join the non-religious World's Chinese Students' Federation and the Shanghai Students' Union in protest. Although YMCA membership was still growing numerically, the number of active members dropped dramatically. At the same time, due to the high overlap between the members of the Shanghai YMCA and the May Fourth protesters, the Shanghai YMCA was caught in the May Fourth Movement, especially the anti-Japanese boycott movement. The organization's involvement in the May Fourth Movement caused international

¹⁰ Bai Yucheng, "God's Model Citizen: The Citizenship Education Movement of the YMCA and Its Political Legacy," *Studies in World Christianity* 26 (2020): 42-62; Ryan Bean, *Selling the Mission: The North American YMCA in China 1890-1949* (Taiwan: National Central University, 2012); Chen, *Dongyuan de lilianhui: Shanghai xuechao de qiyuan* 动员的力量: 上海学潮的起源 [The Power of Mobilization: Origins of the Shanghai Student Movement]; Chung Chung Cheuk-Chi, "Politicized Faith: The Transformation of the Discourse 'Character, China's Salvation' of the Chinese YMCA, 1908-1927," *Ching Feng* 18 (2019): 123-47.

¹¹ Huang Haibo, *Zongjiao Feiyingli Zuzhide Shenfenjiangou Yanjiu: Yi Shanghai Jidujiao Qingnianhui Weili* 宗教性非盈利组织的身份建构研究 [Research on the Identity Construction of Religious Nonprofit Organization: A Case Study of the Shanghai YMCA] (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2013); Charles Andrew Keller, "Making Model Citizens: The Chinese YMCA, Social Activism, and Internationalism in Republican China, 1919-1937," University of Kansas, 1996.

Christian groups, including the YMCA in Japan and local missionaries, to question the legitimacy of the Shanghai YMCA as a religious organization. This paper conducts a comparative analysis of the Shanghai YMCA and similar domestic organizations by reviewing the organization's annual reports and related newspaper articles. It argues that the YMCA's approach of blending social services with religion did not align with China's evolving social and cultural landscape in the early 20th century, failing to live up to the expectations of the global Christian community, accelerating the organization's decline in subsequent decades.

Although the Chinese public did not directly attack and denounce the Shanghai YMCA's reserved attitude and limited involvement as unpatriotic or imperialistic during the May Fourth Movement, other non-religious organizations with similar structures and members quickly developed by actively participating in the social movement. Consequently, the Shanghai YMCA's power and influence was fragmented. Among the most prominent organizations were the World's Chinese Students' Federation (WCSF) and the Shanghai Students' Union. Li Denghui, the founder of the WCSF, had a Christian background. During his years studying in the U.S., Li was exposed to the North American YMCA. After he went to Shanghai in 1904, Li joined the Shanghai YMCA and later applied what he learned to found the WCSF.¹² Shao Lizhi, a senior member of the WCSF, recalled the purpose of the federation: "He (Li Denghui) launched the WCSF as a patriotic act, aiming to provide an alternative to the YMCA. Since the YMCA is not only religious but also associated with imperialism. [...] Its activities are modeled after the YMCA, with no religious overtones."¹³ This interview indicates that the WCSF hoped to leverage its strength as a non-religious organization established by and made up of Chinese

¹² Qian Yimin 钱益民, *Li Denghui Zhuan* 李登辉传 [Biography of Li Denghui] (Shanghai: Fudan Daxue Chubanshe, 2005), 32-33.

¹³ Wang Laidi 王来棣, *Zhonggong Chuangshiren Fangtanlu* 中共创始人访谈录 [Interview with the Founder of the Chinese Communist Party] (Toronto: Mingjing Chubanshe, 2008), 84.

people to replace the YMCA. In the first five years of the organization, the smaller membership and limited activities suggested that it would not be very successful compared to the Shanghai YMCA. After the 1911 Revolution, Zhu Shaoping, a member of the Shanghai YMCA, was put in charge of the WCSF's membership campaign. Consequently, the membership of the WCSF greatly expanded, invigorating the organization.¹⁴ In 1914, Wang Zhengting, the Deputy General Secretary of the Chinese YMCA, joined the WCSF and led a fundraiser using the YMCA's strategy that achieved the highest donation amount since the federation was established.¹⁵ By 1918, the WCSF had 2155 memberships in total, trailing the Shanghai YMCA by only 1236 members.¹⁶

The May Fourth Movement was a turning point in the history of the WCSF and the Shanghai YMCA. While the Shanghai YMCA hesitated to participate in the protests due to the religious world's close scrutiny, the WCSF's non-religious nature and its ubiquitously Chinese membership enabled it to actively join the movement and expand its influence through its involvement. On May 7, the WCSF, and more than thirty universities and middle schools in Shanghai, protested against the arrest and persecution of patriotic students by the Beiyang government authorities: "If the government doesn't follow the people's will and abuses its authority, then we, in order to protect the youth of the whole country, vow to continue the protest until justice and righteousness are brought."¹⁷ On May 9, the WCSF held a National Humiliation Commemoration meeting, where speakers recounted the process of signing the "Twenty-One Demands" that disgraced the country, invoking patriotic anger from the audience. Zhang Huisheng, a member of the WCSF, led the students into the streets, including Jiangwan, Pudong,

¹⁴ "Benhui Lishi Jianyao" 本会历史简要 [Brief History of the Association], *Huanqiu* 寰球, Vol 2, September 1917, 8.

¹⁵ Chen, 165.

¹⁶ "Xueshenghui Dishisici Nianyanji" 学生会第十四次年宴记 [The Fourteenth Annual Banquet of the Student Union], *Shenbao* 申报, April 1, 1919, 10.

¹⁷ Zhu Shaowei 朱少伟, *Shanghai Yanyun* 上海烟云 (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian Chubanshe, 2015).

and other city districts to lecture the masses about the current situation, exposing the criminal acts of pro-Japanese officials Cao Rulin, Zhang Zongxiang, and Lu Zongyu.¹⁸ On the same day, the WCSF also sent representatives to prepare for the National Assembly along with various groups in Shanghai.

Compared to the WCSF's active involvement, the Shanghai YMCA remained officially neutral, only supporting the students indirectly. In the YMCA's 1919 annual report, the General Secretary of the Shanghai YMCA, George A. Fitch, indicates this measured attitude: "During the recent student strike we used the utmost precaution to prevent meetings which could be considered in any way political from taking place in the building, though thereby we ran the serious risk of being boycotted as an unpatriotic institution."¹⁹ Arthur Rugh, the National Student Secretary of the YMCA, also expressed similar concerns in his 1919 annual report. He understood the student protest as a moral crusade, and therefore the YMCA had a responsibility to help. Due to his working experience with Chinese students, Rugh held a more favorable attitude towards protesters than Fitch, stating, "We see no way to stand aloof from the movement, [...] unless we are to brand our movement as unpatriotic and useless in a moral fight."²⁰ However, Rugh also acknowledged the YMCA's involvement in the May Fourth Movement would worsen its relationship with local churches. In the same report, Rugh wrote: "There is a widespread desire on the part of Churches, in the larger centers at least to make a united attack on the whole city including the students." And "In spite of our assertions, they do not consider us 'the Church at work among students.'"²¹ Therefore, with the hope of improving its relationship with local churches and avoiding potential tensions with other international

¹⁸ Zhu, *Shanghai Yanyun*.

¹⁹ George, A. Fitch, "Annual Report, G. A. Fitch, Shanghai, September 30, 1919," University of Minnesota Libraries, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, 1.

²⁰ Arthur Rugh, "Annual Report, 1918-1919, Arthur Rugh, Shanghai, National Student Secretary," University of Minnesota Libraries, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, 7.

²¹ Rugh, "Annual Report, 1918-1919, Arthur Rugh, Shanghai, National Student Secretary," 2-3.

religious organizations, the Shanghai YMCA guarded against the appearance that they were participating in the May Fourth Movement. Although many student leaders of the protest were associated with the Shanghai YMCA, they did not use its name to organize activities. Rather, they protested the government as individuals or members of other social groups, including the WCSF.

Another organization that many YMCA members joined was the Shanghai Students' Union (SSU), established just a few days after the start of the May Fourth Movement on May 11. Arthur Rugh mentioned the SSU in his 1919 annual report: "There is a rival movement developing in the Young Men's Association, which is an organization of young patriots who see the value of the Association and are trying to copy practically all of its program of activities without its religion. This must be reckoned with, and [...] we must go on more vigorously with our own Christian program."²² Chen Yiai's book on the May Fourth Movement in Shanghai confirmed this claim. Chen compares the charters of the Shanghai YMCA and the SSU, concluding that students of the SSU probably used the charter of the YMCA as a template and reference when they wrote their own charter.²³ The overall structure of the YMCA and the SSU were also similar. They both had a separate board of directors and executive branches. Under the executive branch, the Shanghai YMCA had nine departments.²⁴ The Shanghai Students' Union also gradually developed the same number of departments. The similarities between the YMCA and the Shanghai Students' Union were not just in organizational structure, as the large number of overlapping members between the two organizations proves that these similarities were not just coincidences. According to the articles "Action by Shanghai Union" and "Strike Spreading"

²² Rugh, "Annual Report, 1918-1919, Arthur Rugh, Shanghai, National Student Secretary," 1.

²³ Chen, 538.

²⁴ Ganlan wenhua jijinhui, and Zhongguo jiaohui yanjiu zhongxin 橄欖文化基金會, 中國教會研究中心, *Zhonghua ji du jiao hui nian jian 1918* 中华基督教年鉴 1918 [Chinese Christian Yearbook 1918] (Taipei: Zhongguo jiao hui yanjiu zhongxin, 1983).

published in *The North China Herald* on May 31, over 20,000 Shanghai students participated in the strike.²⁵ According to Chen's statistics, more than 5,000 of the protesting students belonged to the YMCA, either at the city or state level.²⁶ Combining these two datasets, YMCA-related personnel accounted for one-fourth of students participating in the strike. This evidence shows that many YMCA members were active members of the SSU who contributed to the May Fourth Movement. Since the YMCA was not officially involved in the movement, participants with a YMCA background became less evident and therefore easy to ignore.

As this paper outlined so far, members of the Shanghai YMCA oftentimes were involved in multiple organizations. During the May Fourth Movement, many YMCA members used their connections in organizations like the WCSF or joined the newly formed SSU to protest and strike. Although there was no active opposition to the Shanghai YMCA's activities, member attention to the May Fourth Movement reduced their involvement in the organization and gradually led to a reduction in its program offerings. The annual YMCA summer conferences exemplified this trend. According to Arthur Rugh's annual report in 1919, the YMCA originally planned to organize eleven summer conferences in Shanghai. However, due to the outbreak of the May Fourth protests, the most prominent YMCA Chinese student leaders were busy with patriotic activities and had no time to participate in religious conferences. Therefore, in 1919, the YMCA's summer camps were reduced by three.²⁷ In another report, Rugh also mentioned that "not one of the eighteen men ranked a year ago as student secretaries is now available for full-time student work in local fields."²⁸ He highlighted the need to have more people organizing

²⁵ "Chinese Students' Strike: Action by Shanghai Union", "Strike Spreading", *The North-China Herald*, May 31, 1919, 578.

²⁶ Chen, 531.

²⁷ Arthur Rugh, "Annual Report Letter of Arthur Rugh, National Student Secretary, Young Men's Christian Association of China, for the year ending Sept. 30, 1919," in University of Minnesota Libraries, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, 3.

²⁸ Rugh, "Annual Report, 1918-1919, Arthur Rugh, Shanghai, National Student Secretary," 4.

student-related programs, or “it [would] probably be necessary to close down [...] student work and all non-revenue producing activities.”²⁹ The Shanghai YMCA's inability to join the movement freely impeded its development, unlike the WCSF and the SSU, which participated in student movements without hesitation and were able to expand their influence accordingly. The YMCA lost its appeal as a civic organization as similar, domestic organizations arose. Youth preferred the newer domestic and non-religious organizations over the Western- and religious-based YMCA, even though these organizations were structurally no different.

In sum, the May Fourth Movement was a turning point in both Chinese history and the history of the Shanghai YMCA. After the May Fourth Movement, the Shanghai YMCA was no longer the only organization that provided high-quality social services. Newly developed domestic and non-religious organizations became valid alternatives to the Shanghai YMCA, pushing it towards obsolescence. The YMCA did not adapt well to the social changes that followed in China. The Chinese public found the useful social services provided by the YMCA could exist completely apart from religion. This put the YMCA in an awkward position, foreshadowing its later decline.

Although the Shanghai YMCA sought to remain neutral during the May Fourth Movement, the international Christian community still criticized its perceived politicization, further jeopardizing its legitimacy as a religious organization. A series of newspaper articles reflected these tensions. The first of these articles, the letter mentioned at the beginning of this paper, attacked the Shanghai YMCA's involvement in the anti-Japanese boycott movement. Three days later, on June 20, another missionary wrote a letter to the same newspaper, defending the Shanghai YMCA. In the letter, the author asked the first missionary to “[ascertain] the details of that which he desires to criticize,” and “[suggested] him [...] [to] interview the leaders of the

²⁹ Rugh, "Annual Report, 1918-1919, Arthur Rugh, Shanghai, National Student Secretary," 4.

YMCA and find out the facts.”³⁰ The author concluded by suggesting that the first missionary practice patience and forbearance.

Although no direct response came up after this article, one month later, on July 30, a letter sent by the Japanese YMCA of Shanghai to the Board of Directors of the Central Chinese YMCA of Shanghai “appeared in four out of five of the foreign dailies.”³¹ Among them, *The Shanghai Times* provided the full letter to the public in an article named “Japanese Boycott: Interesting Communication To Chinese Y.M.C.A.” The Japanese YMCA of Shanghai began the letter by emphasizing the principle of the YMCA, which is “to realize in daily life the love of God and the brotherhood of mankind and [...] to practice this not only in serving our local community but also in International relationship.”³² The letter then went on to express the anxiety of the Japanese YMCA witnessing the recent anti-Japanese boycott movement in China. “Despite the tremendous upheaval and violent manifestation of ill-will against anything Japanese,” the Japanese YMCA “deeply trusted that your Association would stand firm in this belief and would guide the agitated public opinion into the peaceful channel of mutual understanding.” However, the letter shifted its tone, claiming that “we have had little evidence to vindicate the action of your Association in this respect.” And the letter claimed that they had much evidence showing that the Shanghai YMCA was “taking a leading part in the boycott movement and in the violent demonstration of anti-Japanese feeling.” The letter further added that this is “the common criticism among our nationals in this city as well as at home,” that “Y.M.C.A. work in this country does not stand solely for the humanitarian purpose of preaching the true spirit of Christianity.” Following this comment, the Japanese YMCA listed nine wrong

³⁰ ANOTHER MISSIONARY, "THE Y.M.C.A. AND A CRITIC," *The North - China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870-1941)*, Jun 28, 1919.

³¹ Fitch, "Annual Report, G. A. Fitch, Shanghai, September 30, 1919," 5.

³² "JAPANESE BOYCOTT: INTERESTING COMMUNICATION TO CHINESE Y.M.C.A. SOME QUESTIONS," *The Shanghai Times (1914-1921)*, Jul 31, 1919.

behaviors of the Chinese YMCA and asked for a “frank explanation” to “clear such understanding among our common patriots.” Those behaviors included the YMCA badges and stamps that appeared in anti-Japanese protests, signatures of Yu Rizhang (the General Secretary of the Chinese YMCA) on dismissal letters of pro-Japanese officials, and meetings that related to the boycott movement taking place in the YMCA building.

George A. Fitch, the General Secretary of the Shanghai YMCA, promptly responded to the letter from the Japanese YMCA in private. However, he was surprised to find that the original letter was still published in local newspapers even after his response. He was even more surprised to learn that his reply “appeared in translated and rather garbled form in the local Japanese papers, and both letters were ultimately telegraphed to Japan and were reprinted very widely over there.”³³ This incident illustrates the pressure the YMCA faced from the international Christian community. Although the YMCA did not participate directly in the political movement, the involvement of its leaders and members in related activities still counted as a sign of engagement. Additionally, criticizing the Chinese YMCA being overly politicalized, the Japanese YMCA’s letter also reflected its own political standpoint, which was in line with the Japanese government. The anti-Japanese boycott movement was protesting the Treaty of Versailles, which granted Japan control of the Shandong province that originally belonged to China. The Japanese YMCA's disapproval of the Chinese YMCA's involvement was not solely for implementing the Christian doctrine or “promoting international friendship between China and Japan,” but also related to the actual interests of the Japanese side.³⁴ Therefore, the international Christian community tended to criticize the Chinese YMCA's actions more

³³ Fitch, "Annual Report, G. A. Fitch, Shanghai, September 30, 1919," 5.

³⁴ "JAPANESE BOYCOTT: INTERESTING COMMUNICATION TO CHINESE Y.M.C.A. SOME QUESTIONS," *The Shanghai Times (1914-1921)*, Jul 31, 1919.

intensely due to political motivations. Under such circumstances, any behavior of the Chinese YMCA was subject to close scrutiny, making it almost impossible to avoid accusations.

Of particular interest, the Japanese YMCA attacked the Shanghai YMCA's North American heritage, claiming that it did not seek "the moral and intellectual amelioration of Chinese people," but "it is being used as a tool of the American propaganda, aiming at the promotion of her national interests and sowing the seeds of dissension to cultivate an anti-Japanese feeling among Chinese people for the benefit of her political ambition."³⁵ An article in *The North China Herald* on the same event echoed this theme with the provocative title "Tool of American Propaganda?: Japanese Comments on Chinese Y.M.C.A." The article stated that "among the Japanese population, the belief is gaining currency that the Y.M.C.A. is being used as a tool of American propaganda."³⁶ Given the YMCA leaders' concerns about being viewed as unpatriotic and imperialist, we can infer that the North American origin of the YMCA no longer served as an attractive brand for Chinese people to join. Moreover, after the Treaty of Versailles, the Chinese public began to see the U.S. as part of a Western imperialist force attempting to colonize their country, which further undermined the YMCA's position in China.

In essence, this analysis explores the relationship between the Shanghai YMCA and both domestic student organizations and the international Christian community during the May Fourth Movement, arguing the YMCA found itself caught between its religious mission and political involvement. As a Christian organization, the YMCA lacked a clear mandate to participate fully in the political student movement. Although the Chinese public did not overtly criticize the YMCA's hesitant attitude, other organizations such as the WCSF and the SSU vied for influence

³⁵ "JAPANESE BOYCOTT: INTERESTING COMMUNICATION TO CHINESE Y.M.C.A. SOME QUESTIONS," *The Shanghai Times (1914-1921)*, Jul 31, 1919.

³⁶ "TOOL OF AMERICAN PROPAGANDA: JAPANESE COMMENTS ON CHINESE Y.M.C.A." *The North - China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870-1941)*, Aug 02, 1919.

in the movement. Meanwhile, the YMCA faced pressure from other Christian institutions that criticized its leaders and members for their involvement in the protests. The YMCA's failure to mediate between the Chinese public and the international community by taking a moderate stance led to dissatisfaction on both sides. This tension foreshadowed the decline of the YMCA in Shanghai and China, as it gradually lost support from both the Christian community and the Chinese public. Despite benefiting from the organizational structure of the Shanghai YMCA, the May Fourth Movement did not give the YMCA direct credit for its contribution. The May Fourth movement marked the beginning of the YMCA's retreat in China, which continued over the following decades as its influence diminished.³⁷

³⁷ Ann Zhu, "ChatGPT," AI chat, <https://openai.com/blog/chatgpt/>. Chat used to refine the language of the essay.

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