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Chen, Huiyi “Rousseau and Dog in Pre-Republic China (A Suggestion to a Puzzle)”  
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**Abstract:** This short piece suggests an explanation for an unusual reference by Zhang Binglin to a mad Rousseau jumping over a river to chase a dog. The piece argues that the dog-chasing story comes from a 1902 issue of Liang Qiqiao's *Xinmin Congao* and explores potential origins for the story from Rousseau's *The Confessions*.

## Rousseau and Dog in Pre-Republic China (A Suggestion to a Puzzle)

Huiyi Chen

### Background

This short article aims at solving one small question that seems to have puzzled the author of *Pioneer of the Chinese Revolution: Zhang Binglin and Confucianism* (Professor Shimada Kenji 島田虔次) and its translator (Professor Joshua A. Fogel) more than two decades ago. The book presented a speech given by an important Chinese revolutionary and intellectual Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1869-1936) in 1906, right after he fled to Japan due to his antagonism for the Qing government. In the speech, Zhang defended his “madness,” arguing that only the neurotic were able to accomplish great deeds and scholarship.<sup>1</sup> His examples were Socrates, Rousseau, Mohammed, Xiong Tingbi 熊廷弼 (1569-1625) of the Ming period, Zuo Zongtang 左宗棠 (1812-1885) in the generation previous to Zhang’s, and Bismarck.

Zhang’s description of the mad Rousseau was the following: “And Rousseau, who advocated popular rights and liberty—did he not jump over a river to chase a dog? He was completely neurotic.”<sup>2</sup> Neither Shimada nor Fogel knew what Zhang was referring to.<sup>3</sup> Though Rousseau was famous for being mad in his old age, the dog-chasing anecdote was not so well-known even in the West. Two questions follow: (1) How did Zhang know about this anecdote concerning Rousseau; (2) if there was a source for Zhang, was the source accurate in describing Rousseau’s experience? After these two questions are answered, the reader will find that the seemingly small puzzle may lead to a big question in intellectual history worthy of further research.

### The Source

To lay out the conclusion first: the dog-chasing story came from a newspaper established by Zhang Binglin’s political enemy—the reformist Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929). Liang established *Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報 in 1902. After Zhang arrived in Tokyo in 1906, he was invited by Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 (Sun Yat-sen, 1866-1925) to be chief-editor for *Min bao* 民報, which was established in 1905 and became the mouthpiece for the revolutionary camp. *Xinmin congbao* and *Min bao* led probably the most intense and juicy political debate in the public discourse before the 1911 revolution.<sup>4</sup>

In the seventh issue of *Xinmin Congbao* (published in April 1902), there was one story entitled “Rousseau and Dogs” (盧梭狗) among several short stories written by a

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<sup>1</sup> “古來有大學問成大事業者，必得有神經病才能做到。”

<sup>2</sup> Shimada Kenji, *Pioneer of the Chinese Revolution: Zhang Binglin and Confucianism*, trans. Joshua A. Fogel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Shimada, p. 148, endnote 30.

<sup>4</sup> See Qi Bingfeng 元冰峯, *Qingmo geming yu junxian de lunzheng* 清末革命與君憲的論爭 (The debate between revolution and constitutional monarchy in the late Qing) (Taipei: Zhongguo xueshu zhuzuo jiangzhu weiyuanhui and Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan zongjingxiao, 1966).

person whose pseudonym was “憂患餘生生”. The stories were gathered under the column named “捫虱談虎錄”. The relevant passage in “Rousseau and Dogs” was the following:

When Rousseau was still young, he walked on the road, and saw a small dog bullied by a big one. He could not bear it, and became angry at once. He drove out the big dog, which ran away by crossing a river. Rousseau could not help but ran after it over the water.

The example in the original context was not to illustrate Rousseau’s madness, but to illuminate the sense of justice in his nature. It was supposed to account for his quest for equality and liberty in his later works.

Though Zhang used the dog-chasing story in a completely different way, it is obvious that the two texts are closely related. It is probable as well that one was referring to the other, especially given the peculiarity of the details of the incident. In fact, it is difficult to imagine that Zhang missed the article in *Xinmin congbao*, though there was no direct evidence from his chronicle. As the most significant newspaper in the public discourse at the time, and as a major opponent in a future political/intellectual debate, articles in *Xinmin congbao* would not easily have evaded Zhang’s eyes. It was very likely, though not conclusive, that Zhang read the story about Rousseau chasing a dog across water from the article written in this issue of *Xinmin congbao*.

The credit of locating this specific passage belongs to Li Huachuan 李華川.<sup>5</sup> Li claimed that the story was well known at the time, and the source was this article in *Xinmin congbao*. But Li got it wrong about who wrote the article. He took for granted that it was written by a man named Lian Mengqing 連夢青, whose pseudonym was “憂患餘生”. The real author was Han Wenju 韓文舉 (1864-1944), a Cantonese and one of the first batch of students of Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927). Han had two pseudonyms: one was “憂患餘生生”, which appeared as the author for the short stories in the seventh issue of *Xinmin congbao*, and the other was “捫虱談虎客”, which was of course the author for the column “捫虱談虎錄”.<sup>6</sup>

To conclude, it was likely that Zhang knew about the dog-chasing story from an article written by Kang Youwei’s disciple and published in Liang Qichao’s newspaper. It was an article published in 1902, a year before Liang’s turning away from radicalism after he came back from a trip to the United States. From 1903, Rousseau became a negative figure in *Xinmin congbao*, as opposed to the positive reconstruction by the revolutionaries.

### Was the Source Accurate?

A further piece of evidence for the source of Zhang’s knowledge of Rousseau’s anecdote was perhaps the *inaccuracy* of the source (i.e., the article “Rousseau and Dogs”). Rousseau seemed to have particular feelings for dogs. In fact, David Edmonds and John

<sup>5</sup> Li Huachuan, “Wan qing zhi shi jie de lu suo xing xiang” 晚清知识界的卢梭形象 (Rousseau’s images among intellectuals in the late Qing), *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue* 中国比较文学 3 (1998).

<sup>6</sup> Zhang Taigu 張泰谷, ed., *Biming yinde* 筆名引得 (Index of pseudonyms) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1971), pp. 101, 145.

Eidinow even wrote a book entitled *Rousseau's Dog* to highlight the companionship Rousseau's dog offered him during his darkest times in the 1760s, when he was decried as a madman.<sup>7</sup> Also, Rousseau praised the effect of his education on an imaginary boy Émile in the following words: "Never did he incite two dogs to fight with one another, never did he get a dog to chase a cat."<sup>8</sup> Émile had not fermented his *amour-propre* yet, and did not seek pleasure by dominating others, even animals. In real life, Rousseau was chased by a Great Dane and was seriously injured when he wrote his last book, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

However, the most relevant dog-related story that might have served as the original source for the Rousseau-dog story in Han Wenju's article appeared in *The Confessions*. Han was specific about the time of the occurrence: it was during Rousseau's childhood, not after he became mad. In Book One of *The Confessions*, in which Rousseau recounted an unjust treatment that he received as a child and that influenced him greatly, he offered an example to illustrate his natural sense of justice:

...my blood boils at the sight or the tale of any injustice, whoever may be the sufferer...as if I were myself its victim.... I have often run till I dropped, flinging stones at some cock or cow or dog, or any animal that I saw tormenting another because it felt itself the stronger.<sup>9</sup>

I think this is the closest thing we can find in Rousseau's works that might be the original source for the anecdote. Comparing the anecdote referred to in Han's article to this original account, we can see the omission of other animals (cock and cow), and the addition of "running across water" to chase the bullying dog, which was picked up by Zhang Binglin in his speech. The fact that Zhang used the distorted version of the incident provides testimony for my argument that he read it in the *Xinmin congbao*, not directly from Rousseau's work or any translation of it.

The next puzzle, I think, is how Kang Youwei's disciple Han Wenju came to know about this seemingly trivial incident, which became well-known in China through Han's article. It would be an interesting topic in the intellectual history regarding the transmission of Western learning to East Asia (*xixue dongjian* 西學東漸). But it is beyond the scope of this short paper.

<sup>7</sup> David Edmonds and John Eidinow, *Rousseau's Dog: Two Great Thinkers at War in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 251.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Clays Ltd., 1953), p. 30.