

## *Original Paper*

# Analysis of the Success of Sino-French University of Lyon in the Training of College Teachers

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### **Abstract**

*The Sino-French University of Lyon, founded in 1921, is the first and only university founded by Chinese abroad in Chinese history. From 1921 to 1951, when it was closed, the Sino-French University of Lyon had a total of 473 registered students, of which 127 obtained doctoral degrees, accounting for 27% of the registered students, nearly one-third. One of the original intentions of the establishment of the Sino-French University of Lyon was to train college teachers for China, and most of the doctoral graduates of the university did return to China to teach in colleges and universities. Based on the relevant historical materials of the Sino-French University of Lyon in the Lyon Municipal Library, this article explores the success of the Sino-French University of Lyon in the training of college teachers.*

### **Keywords**

*Sino-French University of Lyon, College teachers, Higher education, Students studying in France*

Founded in 1921, the Sino-French University of Lyon (SFUL) is the first and only university founded by Chinese people abroad in Chinese history. From 1921 to 1951, when it was closed, the University had a total of 473 registered students, of which 127 obtained doctoral degrees, accounting for 27% of all registered students, nearly one-third. The founding goal of SFUL when it was founded was: "It is not to produce talents, but to produce scholars. It is not to produce qualified scholars, but to produce scholars who really do research. It is definitely not willing to produce scholars who use learning as a stepping stone, but to produce scholars who use learning as a pastime for life. It also has a small purpose, which is to hope that the students here will become capable professors in universities all over China in the future." Therefore, one of the original intentions of the founding of SFUL was to hope that the graduates could become professors in universities all over China at that time. In fact, most of the doctoral graduates of SFUL did become capable professors in domestic universities in the future.

The motivation for the establishment of the Sino-French University of Lyon was in 1919, China proposed to ask France to return part of the Boxer Indemnity to develop China's education, just as the United States used the Boxer Indemnity to establish Tsinghua University. Cai Yuanpei and Wu Zihui proposed that if the French government doubted whether the refund was really used for education, a Chinese university could be established in France. This idea was supported by one of the directors of the Sino-French Education Association, Edouard Herriot, the mayor of Lyon. He proposed that there was an abandoned barracks in Lyon with houses accommodating 200 to 300 people, which could be used for education. Since the return of the indemnity could not be achieved overnight, Jean Lépine, the dean of the medical school of the University of Lyon at that time, proposed that China and France could contribute to the establishment of a prototype of a university, and the proposal was immediately adopted.

The Sino-French University of Lyon was jointly funded by China and France. As the management body of SFUL, Cai Yuanpei served as the Chinese president and Lépine as the French president. The university directors included Li Shizeng, Liu Hou and others from China, and Herriot and others from France. On October 10, 1921, the Sino-French University of Lyon officially opened, and Wu Zihui became the president. Although due to objective reasons such as legal restrictions in France at the time and insufficient funds, the Sino-French University of Lyon did not become an independent university as Cai Yuanpei, Li Shizeng and others had expected, but was only a preparatory school for entering the University of Lyon, a place to provide students with food, accommodation and self-study. Even so, the success of so many university teachers is inseparable from the school's operation.

As a product of Sino-French cultural and educational exchanges, the Sino-French University of Lyon has always attracted the attention of the academic community, including the establishment and evolution of the University, the relationship between famous alumni and the University, the relationship between doctoral dissertations of the University and Sino-Western cultural exchanges, etc., but the current relevant research has not yet touched on the relationship between the University and the training of university teachers. This article uses the relevant historical materials of the Sino-French University of Lyon in the Lyon City Library, and combines other relevant domestic historical materials to track the students of the Sino-French University of Lyon, especially the 127 doctoral students, from their admission, study to graduation, and explore the success of the Sino-French University of Lyon in training university teachers.

### **1. Establishing Strict Admissions Standards to Ensure the Quality of Students**

The reason why the Sino-French University of Lyon has trained so many university teachers is that it has established strict admissions standards to ensure the quality of students. Lyon's students mainly come from undergraduate graduates of domestic universities, while students who have not obtained a bachelor's degree must take an admissions examination to test whether they have the language, mathematics and foreign language skills required for studying abroad. From July 1921, Lyon began to recruit students in China. The first batch of 160 students were recruited in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. The examination in Beijing was presided over by Li Shizeng, in Shanghai by Wu Zihui,

and in Guangzhou by the Education Department of the Guangdong Government. In addition to the Chinese and French governments at the time, the sponsor of Lyon also included Guangdong Province, which allocated special funds for the training of Guangdong teachers. Therefore, 100 of the students were from Guangdong.

The admission method for domestic students is: (1) Students who have obtained a bachelor's degree from a national university or a private university and whose diploma is recognized as sufficient can be admitted without examination. If the diploma is deemed insufficient, the number of places will be returned if the quota is full, and students who are not full can take the examination. (2) Students who are currently studying at a university can be exempted from the examination or only take part of the examination by presenting a certificate of completion signed by the president of the university. (3) University preparatory students can take the examination by presenting a certificate of completion signed by the president, and high school graduates can take the examination by presenting a diploma. The above is the admission method for non-Guangdong students. Since the admission of students in Guangdong Province is aimed at training teachers, applicants must have sufficient academic qualifications, at least a university diploma and a certificate of preparatory completion, and high school graduates are not allowed to apply.

In addition to students who are exempted from the examination, students who take the admission examination need to take the examinations in Chinese, mathematics, and foreign languages. All three subjects must be passed to meet the requirements: (1) Chinese: A high school degree or above is required. If the mathematics score is particularly high, it can make up for the low Chinese score. If the mathematics score is only at a passing level, the Chinese score must also be passed; (2) Mathematics: Algebra, trigonometry, etc. must all be at a high school level or above. If the Chinese language is given the highest grade, the mathematics score can be relaxed, but it still needs to reach the level of secondary school. (3) Foreign language: If the English level is above the secondary school level and the French level is lower, the English test can be chosen; on the contrary, if the French level is above the secondary school level and the English level is lower, the French test should be chosen. If the levels of both foreign languages are lower, then the test cannot be taken. According to the "Shenbao" on August 5, 1921, the original plan of SFUL was to recruit 160 people, but "Beijing and Shanghai were not full, but the number of applicants in Guangzhou exceeded the quota by several times, so the number was full at one time." The first batch of 127 students, led by Wu Zhihui, arrived in France on September 25 of that year and officially opened on October 10. When SFUL was first established, due to the turbulent domestic situation and unstable funding sources, domestic enrollment was suspended. In 1921, a total of 138 people registered, which dropped to 23 in 1922, only 3 in 1923, and only 1 in 1924. After 1926, as the refund of the Boxer Indemnity from France became a stable source of funds for SFUL, the school entered a mature stage of development and the number of students enrolled also tended to stabilize. Before the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the number of registered students each year was basically maintained at around 20, ranging from a dozen to 40. According to Liu Hou, who served as the Secretary-General of the Sino-French University Association and also served as the president of SFUL: Before 1925 and 1926, the

source of SFUL students was mainly applicants from Beijing Sino-French University, Guangzhou Sun Yat-sen University, Zhejiang University, and Central University.

Beijing Sino-French University was founded the year before SFUL, and the students of the school graduated one after another, which began to enrich the source of students for SFUL. The “Guidelines for Sending Undergraduate Graduates of Peking Sino-French University to Study Abroad” issued in 1935 stipulates that undergraduate graduates who meet the following conditions can be sent to study abroad at SFUL (1) those with a graduation score of 70 points or above; (2) those with good conduct and no serious demerits during their studies at the university; (3) those with good health and no major illnesses as examined by the school doctor. Each college can send a maximum of five students per class. For example, the 129 students who obtained doctoral degrees are compared with the “List of Past Graduates of Sino-French University”, among whom about 41 are graduates of Peking Sino-French University.

The source of students at Lyon Sino-French University is mainly domestic students, but when there are vacancies, other Chinese students studying in France are also appropriately admitted. The admission requirements are that the applicant has obtained two bachelor’s degrees from a French university, or has studied at a university-run school or a higher specialized school for more than two years, or has a degree with equivalent grades. At the same time, the applicant must pass the examination organized by SFUL. The exam consists of two items: one is to write an essay or narrative in French, and the other is to translate a French essay into Chinese. From this, it can be seen that if a student wants to be admitted to the Sino-French University of Lyon, he or she must pass the exam organized by SFUL while holding a bachelor’s degree. According to the research of scholar Ge Fuping, in 1927, SFUL recruited Chinese students in France for the first time, and 13 people were finally admitted. They came from Paris, Lille, and Lyon. Some of the students were college students, while others had already obtained a master’s degree. After verification by the author, 8 of the above 13 people, including Zheng Dazhang, Zhao Yanlai, Lin Rong, Jin Shuzhang, Yin Zanzun, Su Fudi, Zhang Hanliang, and Zhang Ruoming, eventually obtained a doctorate degree from SFUL.

## **2. Customized Courses to Prepare Students for Entering French Universities**

Although compared with general universities, the Sino-French University of Lyon is closer to a preparatory school for entering French universities. However, unlike general preparatory schools, the preparatory courses of SFUL are tailored for Chinese students. This unique training model has also become a necessary condition for the high success rate of SFUL. The location of the Sino-French University of Lyon is located in Saint-Irénée Castle in the western suburbs of Lyon. It is an old barracks. As a defensive stronghold, it played an important role in the Franco-Prussian War. Saint-Irénée Castle was rented to the school by the French government for one franc per year. After renovation and reconstruction, the castle has 8 classrooms and more than 60 dormitories, each with 4 people, which can accommodate 250 people. Except for the period during World War II when the castle was requisitioned

by the German army and converted into a military hospital, and students were forced to move to the University of Lyon to live, the rest of the time, students of SFUL studied and lived here.

Most Lyon students enter the University of Lyon, which at that time had four undergraduate programs, 12 specialized schools, and several special research institutes. The four undergraduate programs include liberal arts, law, science, and medicine. The 12 specialized schools are the Chemical Technology School, Leather School, Industrial School, Architecture School, Fine Arts School, Music School, Business School, Agriculture School, Veterinary School, Silk School, and Textile School. Except for veterinary and agricultural schools, the rest of the specialized schools are located in Lyon. Each Lyon student chooses a subject as his or her major at the University of Lyon. Every day, he or she attends classes at the subject location, and after class, he or she returns to SFUL to eat, rest, study, and discuss with other students. If the major you apply for is not available at the University of Lyon, you can also apply to other universities in Lyon. However, if the selected major is not available in Lyon, you can also go to universities in other cities in France with permission.

Among the 473 students registered at SFUL, 102 chose science as their major, 98 chose liberal arts, 77 chose law, 38 chose medicine, 20 chose agriculture, 20 chose chemistry, 18 chose trade, 18 chose art, 16 chose electricity, 9 chose pharmacy, 8 chose engineering, 7 chose comprehensive engineering, 6 chose music, 6 chose textile, 4 chose army, 4 chose aviation, 4 chose leather, 3 chose silk, 3 chose veterinary, 2 chose chemical engineering, 1 chose geography, 1 chose geology, 1 chose library, 1 chose technical drawing, 1 chose mineral, 1 chose architecture, 1 chose papermaking, 1 chose silkworm breeding, 1 chose dyeing, and 1 chose astronomy.

The University of Lyon teaches in French. SFUL students need to take the exam organized by the French government. Therefore, the first thing Chinese students have to face is the language barrier. At that time, the foreign languages learned by the students recruited in China were basically English. Therefore, even if they are graduates of domestic universities and their professional knowledge and English level meet the qualifications for entering foreign universities, they must first learn French at SFUL. It takes at least two years to reach the standard for admission to the University of Lyon. Therefore, when SFUL was first established, it hired French teachers to teach Chinese students French.

In addition to foreign language courses, SFUL will also arrange corresponding professional knowledge courses for students according to the subjects they apply for at the University of Lyon. SFUL has hired French professors of liberal arts to teach students French history and literature, and hired science professors to teach students science. In short, the purpose of SFUL is to cultivate students' foreign language and professional knowledge to the level of being able to study at the University of Lyon. This course tailored for Chinese students, especially the corresponding professional courses, has become the biggest feature of SFUL's teaching. At that time, the general preparatory schools opened in France for foreign students could hardly provide such targeted courses.

In fact, according to the differences in students' French proficiency and academic qualifications, not all students admitted by SFUL need to complete such preparatory courses. Among the Chinese students in

France mentioned in the previous article, Zhang Hanliang and Lin Rong had obtained master's degrees from French universities before entering SFUL and Zhang Hanliang obtained a doctorate in the second year of entering SFUL, and Lin Rong also obtained a doctorate in the third year. From this we can conclude that if a student's language and academic level reaches a certain level, there is no need to study preparatory courses.

### **3. Rich Book Resources to Support Students' Scientific Research**

Strictly control the quality of students and customize courses to lay a solid foundation for entering French universities. In addition to the 127 doctoral degree winners mentioned above, 46 people from SFUL obtained bachelor's degrees and 60 people obtained engineering degrees. The Lyon Municipal Library has a total of 132 doctoral dissertations of SFUL students, involving 130 authors, among whom Yang Jie obtained two science degrees in 1929 and 1932, and Liu Sibin also obtained two science degrees in 1932 and 1935. In addition, Zhang Zugeng's thesis was marked as completed before entering SFUL. He entered SFUL in 1941 and the thesis was printed in 1941. Liu Sibin's first thesis and Yuan Junchang's thesis were also printed in the same year they entered SFUL, and the printing locations were not in Lyon. Liu Sibin entered the school on October 16 of that year, while Yuan Junchang left SFUL the same year he entered the school. Based on this, it can be determined that their thesis has nothing to do with SFUL. In addition, Chang Linding enrolled in 1942, and his thesis was printed in 1941, so he can also be excluded. Therefore, it can be counted that a total of 127 people completed 128 doctoral dissertations and obtained doctoral degrees after entering SFUL.

As mentioned above, SFUL students are not all in universities in Lyon, but also in other universities in France. Since computers were not available at that time, the probability of students' doctoral dissertations being printed outside the place of study was very low. Therefore, we can infer where they studied for their doctorate by the printing place of these dissertations. Except for Wu Xuxin's thesis, which was not officially printed, the other 127 dissertation printing places were distributed in many cities in France, including 77 in Lyon, 39 in Paris, 5 in Trévoux, 2 in Lons-le-Saunier, and 1 each in Bordeaux, Montpellier, Toulouse, and Nancy. In addition, Yang Jie, who holds two doctoral degrees, had both of his papers published in Lyon. Liu Sibin, who also holds two doctoral degrees, published his 1932 paper in Grenoble and his 1935 paper in Trévoux.

127 people received a total of 128 doctoral degrees, including 44 science degrees, 23 medical degrees, 24 law degrees, 24 literature degrees, 9 pharmacy degrees, and 1 each in engineering, data science, microbiology, and psychology. Among the doctoral dissertations of SFUL, there are 39 related to China. In the era without computers and the Internet, the reason why these students were able to complete so many papers related to China is due to the rich book resources of SFUL, especially the Chinese book resources, which provided strong support for students' scientific research. SFUL's Library has a rich collection, divided into two parts, Western and Chinese. The Western part covers thousands of books and hundreds of journals, covering natural sciences, social sciences, medicine, literature, art and other

disciplines. At present, the Lyon Municipal Library still preserves 1,305 Western books from SFUL Library. In addition to Western books, SFUL Library also purchased tens of thousands of Chinese books and subscribed to hundreds of Chinese journals. After the relocation during World War II and poor storage in the later period, this batch of Chinese books was seriously lost and damaged. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France in 1964, this batch of Chinese materials gradually gained the attention of the French side. In the second issue of "European Chinese Journal" in 1987, according to Li Chensheng's statistics, after renumbering, this batch of Chinese books and periodicals totaled 7651 volumes of thread-bound ancient books (1224 types), 3066 volumes of paperback hardcover books (2726 types), and about 400 journals. Taking Chinese journals as an example, among them, "Science", "Science Monthly", "Annual of the Chinese Chemical Society", "Journal of Sino-French Medicine", "Chinese Journal of Pharmacy"

#### 4. Conclusion

Except for a very small number of graduates who settled abroad, the vast majority of graduates from the Sino-French University of Lyon returned to China to develop and became the backbone of various fields such as science, medicine, and education, and contributed to the modernization of China at that time. Taking doctoral graduates as an example, the vast majority of them who returned to China entered colleges and universities, injecting new forces into the teaching staff of colleges and universities and promoting the development of higher education in China. Many graduates joined the Sino-French University in Beijing, such as Feng Shiquan, Guo Linge, Liu Weitao, Shen Baoji, Su Fudi, Wu Yuwan, Yang Kun, Yin Zanzun, Yue Jieheng, Zhang Ruoming, etc. As mentioned above, Guangdong Province allocated funds to SFUL to train teachers for Guangdong Province. Therefore, many doctoral graduates from Guangdong returned to work in Guangdong universities after returning to China. Many of them taught at Sun Yat-sen University, such as Huang Juansheng, Li Guochang, Liu Junxian, Lu Gandong, Sun Danyue, Wu Boliang, Yao Bicheng, etc. Not only in Beijing and Guangdong, their presence is all over the country. The second dean of the School of Medicine of Yunnan University, Fan Bingzhe, the third dean, Zhao Mingde, and the fourth dean, Du Fen, are all doctors of medicine from SFUL

After the impact of World War II and the civil war at home, Lyon Sino-French University has become a small boat in the storm. Since 1943, SFUL has no longer registered new students, and the students who have been on campus have returned to China one after another after 1945. The last date of leaving school in the student list stopped on January 17, 1950. By 1951, Lyon Sino-French University, which had been cut off from funding, had completely withdrawn from the stage of history. Lyon Sino-French University is a special form of Sino-French educational cooperation in a special historical period. Although due to objective conditions, Lyon Sino-French University has not been built into a university in the strict sense as expected by the initiators, it cannot be denied that SFUL has been successful in running schools. Lyon Sino-French University finally achieved its founding goal of training teachers for Chinese universities.

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