

Principal Sir Arthur Currie and the Department of Chinese Studies at McGill

by Macy Zheng

ABSTRACT

This article presents a brief history of the Department of Chinese Studies at McGill University. It examines Principal Currie's tireless efforts to create such a department, and discusses various factors—such as the state of international relations in the 1920s and the establishment of the Gest Chinese Library—which motivated him. It describes Currie's search for a Director, his selection of Dr. Kiang Kang-hu for the position, the Department's years of operation, and its eventual closure in 1934.

RESUMÉ

Cet article présente les grandes lignes de l'évolution du Département d'études chinoises de l'Université McGill. Il examine les efforts déployés par le principal Currie pour créer ce département ainsi que certains facteurs qui ont motivé ses actions, notamment l'état des relations internationales durant les années 1920 et la fondation de la Bibliothèque chinoise Gest. L'article décrit le processus de sélection d'un Directeur par Currie, son choix du Dr. Kiang Kang-hu, les années d'opération du Département et sa fermeture éventuelle en 1934.

Introduction

Sir Arthur Currie is remembered for his distinguished service both as a senior military officer in the First World War, during which he rose to command the Canadian Corps in France, and as Principal of McGill University from 1920 to 1933. His talent was demonstrated in both of these extremely different jobs. He participated in such notable actions as the Second Battle of Ypres, the Somme, Vimy Ridge and Passchendale, was awarded high honours for his service, and was the first Canadian officer ever promoted to the rank of full general. He was likewise highly successful in his career as Principal of McGill, an office in which he served until the end of his life.

One of the tasks to which Principal Currie devoted much energy and enthusiasm was the establishment of the Department of Chinese Studies at McGill. The history of this department and of McGill's Gest Chinese Library is dramatic and little-known. Very few people realize that McGill established the first Department of Chinese Studies in Canada, preceding both the University of Toronto and University of British Columbia East Asian Studies programs. In his article "The True North Strong: Contemporary Chinese Studies in Canada", Graham Johnson summarizes as follows the history of Chinese Studies in Canada:

Until the mid-1960's, Canada's major universities were few, small, elitist and English-speaking. The University of Toronto, Queen's University in Ontario and McGill University in Montreal were world

renowned, but served English-speaking Canada and the Commonwealth, and taught an essentially European-oriented curriculum. Chinese studies were not well represented in them. They were to be found at the University of Toronto and, in the post-war period, at the still small University of British Columbia, in Vancouver in the west.¹

In Johnson's article, there is no reference to the Chinese Department at McGill at all. In fact, the status of McGill's Department of Chinese Studies as the first such department in Canada, and perhaps even in North America, was largely forgotten until it was examined by Su Chen and Juming Zhao in their 2004 article "The Gest Chinese Research Library at McGill University 1926–1936"². The present article will examine this chapter of McGill's history, and in particular Principal Currie's tireless efforts to create such a department at McGill.

Currie's term of office as Principal

When Currie returned to Canada to great acclaim after the First World War, many people thought he would seek a position in government. Few expected him to become a principal at a university. However, Currie seemed happy to accept such a position at McGill:

On 12 April 1920, Currie received a letter from Frank D. Adams, the acting principal of McGill University in Montreal. The University proposed to confer an honorary doctor of laws degree on Currie at its 12

May convocation. Currie was only too pleased to accept, unaware that the school had more in mind for him than an honorary degree.³

At the keynote address delivered at the Meeting of Western Canadian Deans of Arts and Science in 2004, Michiel Horn said: “By 1933, Currie owed his prominence not only to his war record but also to his position in the academic world. Although he was not a university graduate, he had been appointed Principal of McGill University in 1920. McGill’s Board of Governors must have thought that a man who had ably commanded thousands of soldiers would be more than able to hold his own as a captain of the higher learning. They were right.”⁴

Although a war hero and an intelligent leader, Principal Currie did not have much in the way of academic credentials. He only held a secondary school diploma. It was natural that people thought that his lack of experience in university affairs might be a handicap for him. Nevertheless, the organizational abilities and good judgment which he demonstrated in his work helped him overcome his disadvantage of lacking academic experience. According to an article in the *Canadian Great War Project*, Currie’s administrative ability, which was the basis of his leadership in the War, was turned easily to the service of his new responsibilities at McGill. The article also mentions that, with no professional bias, Currie had a natural ability for choosing the best advisors, and that he brought from the Army the habit of loyally supporting his staff. Under him, McGill prospered anew, materially as well as intellectually.⁵

According to more than forty items of correspondence pertaining to the Chinese Department and the Gest Chinese Library which are preserved in the McGill University Archives, Currie applied the same vision, fairness in judgment, passion and ability in creating the first Department of Chinese Studies in Canada, and in finding the most brilliant Chinese scholar to lead the department. It is remarkable that a Principal, with so many other tasks to handle, would spend so much time and energy on this issue. We should also bear in mind that the Department of Chinese Studies was established during the Great Depression, at a time when McGill was in a difficult financial situation. Currie’s eagerness to build a Chinese or Far Eastern Department is illustrated by his letter to Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, which says: “It is strange that in your last paragraph you use phrases which have been in my mind and on my lips for many years. I have longed to build up at McGill a strong Department of Far Eastern Studies.”⁶

Currie’s motivations in establishing the Department

Why was Currie so anxious to establish the Department of Chinese Studies? Perhaps the following factors provide some explanation:

Currie, who had witnessed first-hand the horrors of combat, detested war. He believed that “War is not a means to establish peace. It is a delusion and a lie.”⁷ He hoped war would not happen again, and he tried to find ways to maintain peace. He strongly believed that after World War I European domination of the world would be diminished and the status of other regions, especially Asia, would increase. He felt, however, that people in the West lacked knowledge and understanding of people in the Far East, and China in particular. He believed that universities should provide courses in area studies, such as Chinese studies. In his letter of 1932 to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations in Geneva, Currie said: “Believing, as we all do, that intellectual co-operation and mutual understanding contribute largely to international peace, we felt that such a development might in the end have a value apart from its cultural importance.”⁸ He thought that the time was ripe for such a development in Canada. He found that occidental nations were realizing more and more fully the historical and cultural connection



Figure 1. Portrait of Sir Arthur Currie. Black and white photographic print, 1917. Photographer: unknown. McGill University Archives, PR041486

between China and the West, and were beginning to value and taken an interest in Chinese literature and Chinese culture.

From the economic and political point of view, he thought that by reason of the short Northern Pacific trade route, Canada was a nearer neighbour to China than any other western country. Since Canada's commercial contacts with China were increasing and since no political questions separated the two countries, Canada was an eminently suitable place for a new school of Chinese Studies.

In addition, a historical event played a role in the establishment of some Chinese programs in North America in the early 20th century. Following the Boxer Rebellion,⁹ the Qing Dynasty government was pressed to pay a fine of over US\$300 million to the Eight-Nation Alliance.¹⁰ One of the members of this Alliance, the United States, ended up receiving more money than had been intended; the U.S. government eventually decided to use the difference to create a Boxer Rebellion Indemnity Scholarship Program, whose purpose was to assist Chinese students to study in the States. The United Kingdom later set up a similar program.

In his letter to Edward Beatty, the President of Canadian Pacific Railway, Currie wrote:

We have recently been exploring the possibility of making some contribution to the establishment of

closer relations between Canada and the trans-Pacific nations. The matter has had the careful attention of members of the staff and has been discussed with the Governor General, who was, as you know, the Chairman of the British Delegation which visited China in connection with the remission of the Boxer Indemnity. Such consideration, as we have so far been able to give the subject, leads us to think that the work to which we may best set our hand is the establishment of certain courses connected with China and the political and economic relationships between China and our country.¹¹

I hope that a certain amount of assistance will also be received from the Trustees of the Boxer Indemnity Fund. This fund, in accordance with the still unpublished report of the Advisory Committee, will be administered by a board of trustees of which the majority will be Chinese, and part of it will be devoted to some thirty scholarships of £300 each and a number of fellowships of £500. As the report originally read it provided that the students holding the fellowships should receive their training in the universities of England, but as a result of communications between ourselves and the Governor General an effort is being made to have the report include Dominion universities.¹²



Figure 2. Sir Arthur Currie addressing a crowd at convocation, 1930. Black and white photographic negative, 1930. Photographer: unknown. McGill University Archives, PN029151

Currie added the comment:

We feel assured that if such a department as we propose can be established on a proper footing, its work would be of the greatest value to the country at large.¹³

Currie's point of view on promoting Chinese studies was supported by other leaders at McGill. Wilfred Bovey, McGill's first director of Extra-mural Relations and Extension, explained the significance of setting up Chinese programs in the March 1927 issue of the News Bulletin of the Institute of Pacific Relations. He stated that only in recent years had universities in general recognized the importance of adequate historical studies and accepted the doctrine that the knowledge of the growth and relationships of peoples was in itself an education. Now that the relations of the Asian and European peoples were undergoing such great changes, the history of Asia could not be allowed to remain the closed book which it had long been to Westerners, and there were no more important portions of this book than the chapters which held the story of the Chinese Empire.¹⁴

Bovey further mentioned that Canada had assumed her place in the arena of international affairs, and that McGill University too had begun to think internationally. Therefore, the University had decided to include in the curriculum the study of Chinese literature, history and philosophy and of China's economic and political relations. It had recognized that western culture was not the only basis of education, that the literature and the philosophy of the Far East had a value of their own. It had also recognized that the twentieth century had created a new group of nations, a group centered on the Pacific Ocean, and that much of the future history of the world would be written around the commercial and political intercourse of the countries bordering that great sea.¹⁵

Bovey emphasized that the task of assuring understanding between East and West was one of paramount importance at that time, and one in which all must bear their part. The fruit of these labors would not be gathered the same season or next, but mutual knowledge would in the end bring with it friendship and respect. The education and intellectual co-operation at which McGill and the Institute of Pacific Relations were aiming would be a great agency for the cause of peace on earth.¹⁶

Other academic organizations also started to promote oriental studies following the First World War. For example, the American Council of Learned Societies, founded in 1919, established the Committee on the Promotion of Chinese Studies. Similarly, an ongoing series of conferences and research programs on East-West issues was sponsored by the Institute of Pacific Relations, an independent international organization formed in 1925. Such associations might have encouraged Currie's determination to set up a Chinese Department at McGill.

The Gest Chinese Library

One asset on which Currie was able to capitalize was the Gest Chinese Library, which became an official McGill library in 1926. This rich resource was developed by Mr. Guion Moore Gest, and was housed in the Redpath Library. Its collection was of the best quality ever collected in North America, and it became the largest Chinese collection in North American universities.¹⁷ Berthold Laufer, an Asian studies expert, provided the following description of the Library:

The Gest collection is housed in the attractive library building of McGill University, where it occupies a large room on the second floor. The stacks are of steel, arranged in two stories, the upper one being entirely devoted to the great cyclopedia *Tu Shu Tsi Ch'eng*. The arrangement of the books is so systematic and splendid that any book can be traced at a moment's notice. The photographs taken by Mr. Gest himself in the Orient adorn the walls. The floor is laid with Chinese rugs, and Chinese antiquities in a glass cabinet.¹⁸

He also outlined the content of the collection:

The library is at present well equipped for research work. It is especially strong in dictionaries, historical works, catalogues, encyclopedias, and medicine. One of the greatest treasures of Mr. Gest is an extensive collection of sutras from a Tripitaka edition which were obtained in a remote part of China.¹⁹

Currie devoted much time and attention to obtaining the Gest Library for McGill and to ensuring the library's subsequent development and survival. In his letter to Edward Beatty, the Chancellor of McGill, Currie expressed his desire to better use the library:

In connection with the Department of Chinese Studies, we could make much fuller use than is now possible of the magnificent research library of which we have come into possession.²⁰

In his letter to Dr. Keppel, the President of the Carnegie Foundation, Currie further stated his aspiration of making full use of the library:

I have always felt that the best use to make of library, in its earlier days, was to develop an interest in and a knowledge of Chinese Civilization. I felt that in using the Library in this way, we were opening a door to a knowledge of a civilization of which we know altogether too little.²¹

Ever since the establishment of the Gest Library, Currie was proud that McGill had such a Chinese library and he invited many dignitaries to visit it. From his home in what is now McGill's Faculty Club, he must have enjoyed looking across the street at the original Redpath Library, which housed the prized Chinese collection.

In 1931, Currie spent several weeks visiting China, Japan and India. He mentioned this in his letter to Mortimer Graves, Secretary for the Committee on the Promotion of Chinese Studies:

We appreciate our good fortune in having the Gest Chinese Research Library at McGill and are anxious that opportunity should be given for the greatest possible use of the facilities available. I spent about three weeks in China during my recent visit to the Orient and come away with the impression that a greater degree of stability is now apparent than has been evident for years. We can hardly over-estimate the value of serious Oriental studies in our Western universities.²²

Planning the establishment of the Chinese Studies Department

Although the Chinese Studies Department was not officially established until 1930, Currie had considered this matter many years earlier. In his letter to Dr. Frederick P. Keppel, the president of the Carnegie Foundation, Currie wrote:

Ever since coming to McGill University as Principal in 1920, I have been interested in the education of Chinese students in Canada. I remember that when I was a member of a Committee of the Canadian Universities Conference on the question of the education of Chinese students in Canada, the matter was very thoroughly gone into. Furthermore, my Chancellor, Mr. Beatty of the Canadian Pacific Railway, was also interested.²³

Earlier, on November 17, 1926, Currie wrote to Beatty:

We are not yet prepared to put forward a defined plan of organization, but so far as we can see at present it would be necessary to establish a Department of Chinese Studies in which the student might be furnished with a background of Chinese history, literature and philosophy, and to treat at the same time the more clearly defined economic questions, interesting both China and Canada, in the Department of Political Economy. In connection with the Department of Chinese Studies, we could make much fuller use than is now possible of the magnificent research library of which we have come into possession.²⁴

Currie hoped that the students would be of several categories:

1. Canadian or British students preparing themselves to go to China for employment in Commerce.
2. Canadians intending to be missionaries.
3. Chinese students coming from China.

4. Chinese students living in Montreal.²⁵

From this we can see that Currie not only had a plan in mind to set up the Chinese Department but also that he had considered the details of its implementation.

Currie submitted his proposal for the formation of a Department of Chinese Studies to McGill's Board of Governors on December 20, 1926. The Board approved the plan in 1927. In the three years which elapsed between this date and the actual establishment of the Department in 1930, however, much planning still had to be done. This work included consulting professors from the departments of History, Economics, Philosophy, and Literature on various aspects of the project.

One of the individuals who provided input was Wilfrid Bovey, the Director of Extra-mural Relations and Extension, who was greatly valued by Currie. Bovey envisioned that education on Chinese culture and civilization would be carried out in the new Chinese Department, and that courses on China would also be offered in the Department of Political Economy. Bovey, like Currie, regarded the Gest Library as a perfect resource for students in this field.

Currie's involvement in setting up the Chinese Studies Department included such elements as searching for its chairman and other teaching staff and considering their salaries. Currie discussed some of these issues in a letter to Mr. Beatty:

Mr. G. M. Gest is, as you are aware, already providing for the salary of the librarian and for the time being of an assistant. In addition to this we should require sufficient funds to meet the salaries of the teaching staff. We can save a certain amount by utilizing the services of men already with us, to whom however we should have to pay a little more than at present. We should require one new instructor who would take charge of the Department of Chinese Studies. Possibly it might be as well to have a Chinaman, if we could procure one of sufficient eminence.²⁶

Searching for a chairman

Currie's letter to Beatty reflects the fact that he and Bovey both wanted the Department of Chinese Studies to be headed by a scholar capable of bringing to Westerners a new appreciation of the oldest of civilizations. A difficulty faced by Currie in this regard was that, at that moment, there were no scholars of international repute in this field at McGill. It was suggested that this problem could be resolved through an exchange of professors between McGill and one of the leading universities in China. This plan, however, does not seem to have been carried out successfully. The difficulty of finding the right professors for the new unit explains in part why the Chinese Department was not established until 1930.

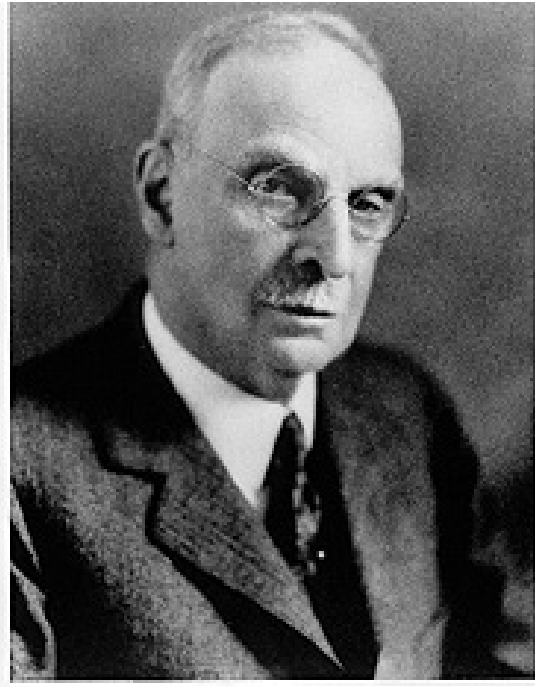


Figure 3. Picture of Mr. Guion Moore Gest (1864-1948) from Princeton University East Asian Library's website: <http://eastasianlib.princeton.edu/history.htm>. Accessed Dec 17, 2011



Figure 4. Gest Chinese Research Library, Redpath Library, McGill University, 1931. Photographer: Rice. McGill University Archives, PR026617

Currie personally handled the task of interviewing and comparing candidates for the position of the chair. According to Dorothy McMurray, the Principal's secretary, Currie felt that the selection of teachers was his responsibility: he would seldom hire a new professor, or even a lecturer, without having interviewed the candidate to assure himself that the individual was, in addition to being highly recommended by academic authorities, someone who was worthy of McGill and who would enhance the University's good name.²⁷ His search for a suitable individual for this position, which began in 1927, was initially disappointing, as he mentioned in his letter to Mr. Gest: "On investigation the majority of them have been found wanting. Some of them were little better than newspaper correspondents and journalists who had written much about China without any profound knowledge of the subject."²⁸ His frustration was also shown in his letter to Mr. Berthold Laufer: "We are very proud of the Gest Chinese Research Library and regret that up to the present we have had no success in picking upon a suitable man to lead the Department of Chinese Studies which we would like to set up."²⁹

The man eventually chosen by Currie in 1930 to head the Department was Dr. Kiang Kang-Hu. Kiang accepted this position and declined another one in the United States which offered him much higher salary. In his letter to Currie, Kiang said that his decision was made not by weighing material gains.³⁰ Kiang was recognized as being both intelligent and knowledgeable in the field of Chinese studies, and Currie was gratified to have been able to recruit him. He was, however, a controversial figure in the political history of modern China, for reasons we will discuss briefly.

Kiang Kang-Hu's background

Kiang Kang-Hu was born to a high official family in Kiangsi, China in 1883. His father and his grandfather both took the third and highest degree of the old style Chinese examination, and were appointed to the Hanlin Academy, which was the highest scholastic rank under the old Chinese system. He was a gifted student, and apart from Classic Chinese, he had a solid command of the Japanese and English languages at a young age. He went to Japan to attend the Imperial University at Tokyo in 1900 when he was seventeen years old. He held posts in the imperial ministries of justice and education between years of 1900 and 1910; taught Japanese language and Chinese history at Peking University between 1905 and 1910; and founded the Chinese Social-Democratic Party in 1912. From 1914 to 1920, he taught Chinese language and civilization at the University of California. Kiang later returned to China to teach at Nanjing, and worked on various constitutional committees for the republican government. He came back to America in 1926, and was hired as a Chinese consultant for the Library of Congress in 1928. He was appointed Chairman of the Department of Chinese Studies at McGill in 1930.³¹

Kiang was politically active and he was considered the first person to introduce socialism to China. He organized the Chinese Socialist Party to promote socialism and became its leader. In his book *Red Star over China*, Edgar Snow, an American journalist, mentioned that Chairman Mao Zedong told him that Mao had first learned about socialism from Kiang Kang-Hu when he was a college student: "I read some pamphlets written by Kiang Kang-Hu about socialism and its principles. I wrote enthusiastically to several of my classmates."³² Kiang was even said to have had the chance to meet Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union.³³ However, his party was banned by the Yuan Shikai government in 1913; his arrest was ordered, but he managed to flee to the United States.

It seemed that during his years in North America, Kiang focused more on academic teaching and research than political activities. During this time, Kiang worked at University of California at Berkeley, the Library of Congress and eventually McGill. He donated over 10,000 volumes to the library at Berkeley, which became the basis for Berkeley's establishment of its East Asian Library. Kiang gave many lectures about Chinese literature and culture on various occasions in the United States and Canada. He also wrote a number of books on Chinese history, culture and politics in Chinese, Japanese and English, and collaborated with the American poet Witter Bynner on *Jade Mountain*, a volume of translations of Chinese poems.

In contemplating the appointment of Kiang as chair of the Department of Chinese Studies, Currie was very satisfied with his qualifications but realized that his political background might be problematic. He therefore did his best to ensure that Kiang's earlier political activities did not cause him any trouble. When Currie discussed Kiang with Mr. Gest, the latter expressed his satisfaction with the appointment of Kiang, stating that he had heard nothing but the best reports regarding his scholarship. Gest did, however, draw Currie's attention to the fact that Dr. Kiang was at one time a very prominent supporter of the Kuomintang party, that he had been to Moscow to investigate Bolshevism, and that he had at one point been viewed as slightly Communistic. Currie informed Mr. Gest that he had discussed this matter with Kiang, who had told Currie that when the revolution in China came all Chinese became interested in all revolutions. Kiang had said that there was a great deal of Communistic propaganda in China and that he had gone to Moscow to study Communism for himself, but that he had come away with the opinion that it would not do for China.³⁴

The Department of Chinese Studies during its years of operation

The Department of Chinese Studies became a reality in 1930. It was recorded in McGill's Annual Report of 1930-1931:

At the beginning of the session under review the Faculty of Arts added a new department, that of Chinese Studies. The presence at McGill of the Geste Chinese Research Library, one of the best-equipped Chinese libraries outside China, made the establishment of this department highly advisable. Canada is situated on two seas, the Atlantic and the Pacific, and the relations between the Dominion and the Orient will inevitably become of increasing interest in the future. Universities are essentially international institutions and the influence of universities on international relations is very much greater than usually imagined. In order that Canadians may have suitable facilities for learning something of Chinese history and geography, Chinese government and social institutions, Chinese philosophy and religion, literature and art, some Canadian university had to lead the way.³⁵

McGill University thereby became the first Canadian educational institution to house a Chinese Department, with a Chinese scholar as a full professor for its chair.

Under Kiang's guidance, the Department of Chinese Studies offered regular university courses to students of second year or higher standing in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. A lecture course on Chinese culture in general was given in English as an introduction to all branches of Chinese studies. It outlined Chinese history, geography, government and social institutions, philosophy, religions, literature and art in a series of lectures completed in two academic years of three hours per week. All materials were drawn from Chinese sources and interpreted from the Chinese viewpoint. Language classes were open for elementary and advanced students. Chinese readers in Kuo Yu (Mandarin language) were used, with well-selected characters.³⁶



Figure 5. Kang-Hu (1883-1954). Picture from website of Baidu: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/477462.htm>. Accessed December 17, 2011 Kiang

Brush-stroke calligraphy was also part of the curriculum. For advanced students there were courses in reading Chinese classics in the original text, as well as modern documents and newspapers. Translations from spoken Chinese (bai hua wen) to written Chinese language (wen yan wen), and from Chinese into English were taught. Research on special topics was carried on by special arrangement, with reference readings in the Geste Library and submission of periodical reports or papers.³⁷

Beginning in 1932, the Department also offered graduate courses in Chinese studies. Any qualified student holding a B.A. degree who had a workable knowledge of either the Chinese written or spoken language, or both, might take these courses as a major or minor subject and work towards the M.A. degree. Since only second or higher year students of good standing in other subjects were allowed to elect the Chinese courses, the enrollment had not been very large. For the initial two years about one hundred names were registered with the department in various classes.³⁸

Although the Geste Chinese Research Library already existed, a small Department Library was set up to provide additional materials in the form of popular and indispensable Chinese books for the constant use of its staff and students. There were over 500 items of modern Chinese works and reprints of old works in all the four main Chinese library classification groups. A large number of Chinese pamphlets, periodicals and daily papers were being received from China and the Chinese communities abroad. The objective of this library was to supplement rather than duplicate the Geste collection. Kiang believed that in the years to come this departmental library, started in a very humble way, would grow in size and usefulness.³⁹

In 1931, with the co-operation of the Department of Extra-Mural Relations, Kiang organized the Hung Tao Society of Montreal as a branch of the parent society in China, for



Figure 6. Kiang's calligraphy. Picture from website of Baidu: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/477462.htm>. Accessed December 17, 2011

the diffusion of Chinese thought and the popularization of Chinese philosophy. It was found necessary to form two sections, one for the Canadians and English-speaking Chinese and the other for the Chinese-speaking Chinese. There were eight lectures in each section throughout the academic year on cultural subjects, and a number of special and social meetings at which Chinese teas and dinners were served. In the Chinese section there were also lectures on the modern Chinese language. Over two hundred Canadians and one hundred fifty Chinese paid membership fees, and a large number of them were regular attendants at the meetings of the Society.

Resolutions were passed to establish two scholarships at McGill, one for a Canadian student in the Chinese Department and the other for a Chinese student in the University, having regard in both cases to the academic achievements of the students and to his or her financial needs. Extension classes, both cultural and linguistic, were scheduled for the first time in the fall of 1932, and according to University statistics for the first two years of the department's operation, Professor Kiang had the largest number of outside lectures among the faculty staffs—a reflection of the growth of public interest in the field of Chinese studies on this continent.⁴⁰

Currie's correspondence makes it clear that he was very satisfied with the performance of Kiang as the chair of the department. In a letter he wrote in 1931 to Prince Amoradat Kridakara of Siam (now Thailand), he said:

We have set up at McGill University a Department of Oriental Studies, presided over at present by Dr. Kiang Kang-Hu, an eminent Chinese scholar. Besides giving instruction in the Chinese language, philosophy, history, and literature, he lectures in a general way on all Far Eastern affairs. We have established the Department because of our conviction that it is wise for us to know something of the civilization of the Far East, their history and development.⁴¹

Another example of Currie's high regard for Kiang can be found in a 1932 letter to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, in which he wrote:

The University decided to undertake the organization of a Department of Chinese Studies. We decided, at

the same time, that other things being equal, it was desirable that the Department should be headed by a Chinese scholar, just as our Department of Romance Languages is headed by a French scholar. After long search, during which appeal was made to almost every known sinologist, we obtained the services of Dr. Kiang Kang-Hu, a renowned scholar of Northern China, known and recognized through that country and Japan as a pre-eminent authority on the Chinese classics and holder of the ancient Han Lin degree. Under his leadership, the organization of the Department has been carried out.⁴²

He commented on this appointment with evident pride:

So far as I am aware, this is the only Department of an Occidental university concerned with Chinese studies which is headed by a Chinese scholar with the rank of full professor, and in which extension work is actually carried on among Chinese-speaking people.⁴³

Currie expressed similar sentiments in a 1933 letter to Dr. Keppel, which states:

Then, three years ago, I engaged a professor of Chinese Studies, Dr. Kiang Kang-Hu, who, I think it will be admitted, is one of the greatest Chinese scholars of China. In the three years he has been here, Dr. Kiang Kang-Hu has been successful in building up the Department of Chinese Studies. It can never be a large department, of course.⁴⁴

Death of Currie and closure of the Chinese Department

In his book *Sir Arthur Currie: a biography*, Daniel Dancocks describes Currie's final days:

The first weekend of November 1933 had begun well. On Friday, before leaving the office, Currie had joked with Mrs. McMurray about his health. He had assured her that he felt fine—never better, in fact—and predicted that “I can count on a good ten year yet.”⁴⁵

“On Sunday, 5 November, Currie was working at home. He was in the study, composing his annual

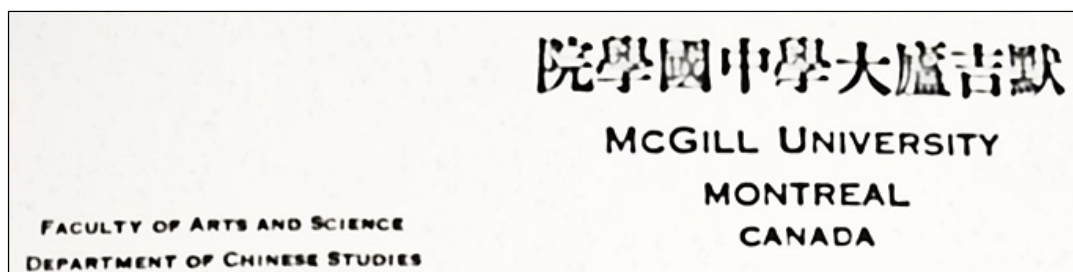


Figure 7. Letterhead of the Department of Chinese Studies. Letterhead in a file of RG2, C69. The McGill University Archives

Armistice Day message, but he did not complete it. Currie collapsed and was later taken to the Royal Victoria Hospital.⁴⁶

Currie passed away on November 30th, 1933, a few days after the 15th anniversary of the Armistice, at the relatively young age of 58.

The Chinese New Year celebration came soon afterwards, and at the request of Mr. Gest, it was decided, out of respect to the late Principal, to omit the Chinese New Year's tea party. It was on the occasion of the Chinese New Year's Day on February 13, 1926, that the Gest Chinese Research Library had first opened to the public. Since that date, upon the recurrence of the old Chinese festival season, a tea party had been customarily held each year in the Library, and Currie would be invited to the celebration.

McGill did not have a Principal for about two years following Currie's death, and Edward W. Beatty, the Chancellor of McGill, served as unofficial Principal.⁴⁷ On July 5, 1934, the Board of Governors accepted a recommendation from the Finance Committee and decided to discontinue the Department of Chinese Studies:

Upon the recommendation of the Finance Committee, as a measure of economy the Board of Governors decided to discontinue the Department of Chinese Studies and to withdraw financial support from the Gest Chinese Research Library. This Department was founded in 1930 under the direction of Dr. Kiang Kang-Hu, and has made a valuable contribution towards the promotion of Canadian interest in Chinese culture, history and civilization. It is regretted that funds are no longer available for its continuance.⁴⁸

The Board informed Kiang that his contract with McGill had been terminated.⁴⁹ At that time, Kiang was in China taking one year of unpaid leave. Responding to McGill's notice of dismissal, Kiang wrote: "I do not complain for the discontinuance of the Chinese Department nor do I beg for any special favor, but I cannot understand how a professor can be so slighted and ignored by an institute of McGill's standing. I am doubly sorry for this treatment since the University has shown me great consideration and I have repeatedly pledge undivided service."⁵⁰

After his dismissal from McGill, Kiang stayed in China for the rest of his life. He became involved in politics once again, at the cost of further troubles. In contrast with his earlier political orientations, he now began working for the pro-Japanese Wang Jingwei regime. At the end of the Second World War, he was captured by the Nationalist Chinese government and sentenced for treason to life in prison, where he died in 1954.

In May of 1946, Mrs. Kiang wrote a letter to Principal Frank Cyril James.⁵¹ In her letter, Mrs. Kiang said that her

husband was not a criminal, and she had contacted many friends for her husband's rescue, but failed. Now she had to appeal to Principal James in the hope that Kiang's past services and contributions at McGill might prompt James to offer some help in this regard.⁵²

James immediately replied to her:

Your letter of May 28th has been received, and naturally all who knew you and your husband during the brief time he spent at this University will be indeed sorry to hear of his present difficulties. Since I was not in office then, however, I could not personally take any action such as you suggest, but I do know that some of my colleagues who knew him were at one time instrumental in helping him out of somewhat similar troubles and I will make inquiries and see what the situation may be at present as regards forwarding an appeal on his behalf.⁵³

At the same time, James wrote to Bovey:

I am attaching for your perusal and return to me a letter from Mrs. Kiang concerning her husband, the former Professor of Chinese Studies here. Mrs. McMurray tells me that some years ago he got into similar difficulties and that you were instrumental in saving his life. She is also of the impression that since then it became known to the local Chinese community leaders that he actually was a disloyal Chinese and was cooperating with the Japanese puppet government. This was some years ago possibly before 1940, but if it is true it would land colour to the charges on which he is at present imprisoned. I should be glad to hear from you, with the return of the letter, as to whether you think you should take any further steps on behalf of the University in this matter.⁵⁴

Bovey wrote back to James, saying that he did help Kiang successfully the previous time and he was released. But ordinary diplomatic channels would be of no value in the present case. Bovey said that his feeling was that Kiang was too impractical a man to have been involved in a real plot, and he knew that Kiang felt in his heart that Chinese culture was immeasurably superior to Japanese.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Currie once said in a letter to Frederick P. Keppel: "I always dreamed that here at McGill we might set up a Department of Far Eastern Studies, to include a study of Purdon, Indian, Chinese and Japanese civilization."⁵⁶ Although Currie fulfilled his dream of establishing the Department of Chinese Studies, the unit he had worked so hard to create did not survive him for long. The Gest Chinese Library soon suffered a similar fate: two years after the closure of the Chinese Department,

financial and other reasons resulted in the move of the Library to Princeton University.

Currie's remark that the Department of Chinese Studies could "never be a large department, of course" proved to be an accurate—indeed, an overly optimistic—prediction for the decade that had seen its establishment. In 1968, however, thirty-four years after the Department's closure, the formation of Department of East Asian Studies marked not just the return of Chinese studies to McGill but also the extension of the University's teaching and research activities into the realm of Japanese and Korean studies. Principal Currie would no doubt have been pleased to know that, one day, Far Eastern Studies would be pursued at McGill with an even greater scope than he was able to witness in his own lifetime.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my colleague Marc Richard for his assistance in editing the draft of this article and for translating into French the abstract and my biographical sketch.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Ms. Theresa Rowat, Ms. Mary Ellen Worgan Houde and other staff at the McGill University Archives for helping me access related documents for my research.

Notes

To prepare this article, I have also consulted documents RG32 "Correspondence and lecture: Kiang Kang-Hu," and documents in MG 4025 at MUA, which includes photos, business cards, postal cards, students' examinations, receipts of books purchased for the Chinese Department, etc. Not much information in these files is directly related to the content of this article.

ENDNOTES

¹Graham E. Johnson, "The True North Strong: Contemporary Chinese Studies in Canada" *The China Quarterly*, 1995, p. 851–866.

²Su Chen and Juming Zhao. "The Gest Chinese Research Library at McGill University, 1926–1936." *The East Asian Library Journal*, v. XI, no. 2 (Autumn, 2004), p. 40–99.

³Daniel G. Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: a biography*. (Toronto: Methuen, 1985), p. 206.

⁴Keynote address delivered at the Meeting of Western Canadian Deans of Arts and Science. *History of Intellectual Culture*, 2004, retrieved from : www.ucalgary.ca/hic/files/hic/horn.pdf · PDF file

⁵*Canadian Great War Project*, <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/transcripts/transcriptDisplay.asp?Type=N&transNo=303>. Accessed December 17, 2011.

⁶Currie to Butler. May 8, 1933. RG2, C.69, File 1386, McGill University Archives.

⁷Robert H. Michel, "The General Portrayed: Sir Arthur Currie and His Painters." *Fontanus*, vol. 7 (1994), p. 73.

⁸Currie to the Secretary-General, the League of Nations, Geneva, October, 27, 1932. RC2, C69, McGill University Archives.

⁹The Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists, known as "Boxers" in English, led a rebellion in China between 1898 and 1901 against foreign imperialism and Christianity.

¹⁰The Eight-Nation Alliance was an alliance of nations made up of Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States.

¹¹Currie to E.W. Beatty, President, Canadian Pacific Railway. November 17, 1926, RG2, C59, McGill University Archives.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴"Department of Chinese Studies: McGill University." *News Bulletin (Institute of Pacific Relations)*. March 1927. p.13.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷For details about Mr. Gest and the library, please refer to Su Chen's "The Gest Chinese Research Library at McGill University, 1926–1936." *The East Asian Library Journal*, v. XI, no. 2 (Autumn, 2004), p. 40–99.

¹⁸Berthold Laufer, *The Gest Chinese Research Library at McGill University*. [1929?] p.5.

¹⁹Ibid., p.6.

²⁰Currie to Beatty, Nov. 17, 1926. RG2, C 59, McGill University Archives.

²¹Currie to Frederick P. Keppel. February 14, 1933. RG2. C69, McGill University Archives.

²²Currie to Graves. May 13, 1931. RG2, C69, McGill University Archives.

²³Currie to Frederick P. Keppel. February 14, 1933. RG2. C69, McGill University Archives.

²⁴Currie to Beatty, RG2. C59, Nov. 17, 1926. McGill University Archives.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Currie to Beatty, Nov. 17, 1926. RG2, C59, McGill University Archives.

²⁷McMurray, D. (1974). *Four principals of McGill: A memoir 1929–1963*. p. 16–17.

²⁸Currie to Gest, September 23, 1927. RG2, C69, McGill University Archives.

²⁹Currie to Dr. Berthold Laufer, October 28th, 1929, McGill University Archives.

³⁰Kiang to Currie, March 11, 1930. RG32, C735, File 4440. McGill University Archives.

³¹Part of the biographical information about Kiang Kang-hu is from "Biographical Sketch of Kiang Kang-hu," RG2, C59, McGill University Archives.

³²Snow, Edgar. *Red star over China*. New York: Grove Press, 1968. p. 142.

³³Website of Baidu: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/477462.htm>. Accessed December 17, 2011.

³⁴Interview with Gest, June 20th, 1930. RG2, C69, File 1387, McGill University Archives.

³⁵"Department of Chinese Studies is Inaugurated." *Annual Report 1931–1932*. p.14.

³⁶Department of Chinese Studies. RG2, C69, File 1387, McGill University Archives.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Currie to Prince Amoradat Kridakara, August, 5, 1931, RG2, C69, File 1387, McGill University Archives.

⁴²Currie to Secretary-General, the League of Nations, Geneva, October 27th, 1932. RG2, C69, McGill University Archives.

- ⁴³Ibid.
- ⁴⁴Currie to Frederick P. Keppel. February 14, 1933. RG2, C69, 2207E, McGill University Archives.
- ⁴⁵Daniel G. Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: a biography*. (Toronto: Methuen, 1985), p. 279.
- ⁴⁶Ibid.
- ⁴⁷McMurray, D. (1974). *Four principals of McGill: A memoir 1929–1963*. Montreal: Graduates' Society of McGill University. p. 35.
- ⁴⁸"Changes in Policy and Curriculum". *McGill University Annual Reports of the Corporation, 1933–1934*. p. 17.
- ⁴⁹Governors' minutes re: Department of Chinese Studies. RG4, C19. McGill University Archives.
- ⁵⁰Kiang to Bovey, November 1, 1934. RG4, C19. McGill University Archives.
- ⁵¹Frank Cyril James was the Principal and Vice-chancellor at McGill 1940–1962.
- ⁵²Mrs. Kiang to James, RG2, C85. File 2164, McGill University Archives.
- ⁵³James to Mrs. Kiang. RG2, C85, File 2164, McGill University Archives.
- ⁵⁴James to Bovey. RG2, C85, File 2164, McGill University Archives.
- ⁵⁵Bovey to James, RG2, C85, File 2164, McGill University Archives.
- ⁵⁶Currie to Frederick P. Keppel. February 14, 1933. RG2, C69, File 2207E, McGill University Archives.