

## **From Trust to Mistrust:**

### **Sino-Japanese Relations after the Versailles Settlement**

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Commonly known as the May Fourth Movement, the 1919 moment in China was full of anger, frustration, and disillusionment. On May Fourth of 1919, thousands of students marched through Beijing protesting the Versailles Settlement, which transferred the German colonies in Shandong to Japan. Spurred by what they considered as an unjust decision, the protesters ransacked the home of an official in the Chinese foreign ministry who appeared to not be doing enough to press the Allied Powers. In the following days, protests spread to other cities such as Shanghai, revealing massive disillusionment with the hypocrisy of the Allied Powers that promoted national self-determination on the one hand, and supported imperialism and colonialism on the other.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The list of the standard literature on the May Fourth Movement is long. The major ones include: Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), Lin Yü-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: The Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). For a thoughtful

As Xu Guoqi points out, the “1919 moment” in China signaled the end of Chinese naiveté toward the openness of the international system.<sup>2</sup> In foreign relations, the “1919 moment” ushered in a new era in Chinese diplomacy that focused primarily on securing national sovereignty, ensuring borders integrity, and maximizing national interest.<sup>3</sup> Thus, its impact was long-term. For decades to come, Chinese leaders realized that reaching “the standard of civilization” as a modern nation was no longer the path to be recognized as a full-fledged member of the international community. Rather it was to gain wealth and power by securing land and resources.

This change of view was not only political but also cultural. In standard historical accounts, “May Fourth” (*wusi* 五四) means both the “May Fourth Movement” (student protests in 1919) and the “May Fourth New Culture Movement” (language reforms and cultural renaissance from 1915-1923).<sup>4</sup> This doubling of the meanings of “May Fourth” is by no means accidental. It is to highlight two differing meanings of the ‘1919 moment’ in China. It was, in the

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study of student activism of the May Fourth protest, see Fabio Lanza, *Behind the Gate: Inventing Students in Beijing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War: China’s Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15–16.

<sup>3</sup> William C. Kirby, “The Internationalization of China: Foreign Relations at Home and Abroad in the Republican Era,” *China Quarterly* 150.2 (1997): 439–41.

<sup>4</sup> For the double meaning of “May Fourth,” see Chow Tse-tsung’s introduction to *The May Fourth Movement*.

short run, a political movement driven by anticolonial nationalism,<sup>5</sup> and, in the long run, a cultural awakening when China's role in the world was drastically changed from the center of "all under heaven" (*tianxia*) into a single nation-state (*guojia*) among many.<sup>6</sup>

Although ostensibly the two "May Fourths" were separate events—one political and the other cultural—they were part of China's struggle to find its place in the international system. In the words of Li Zehou 李澤厚, the two "May Fourths" signify the competing claims of *national salvation* symbolized by student protests in 1919, and *cultural enlightenment* shown in the language reforms and cultural renaissance of the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>7</sup> Temporally, the two "May Fourths" did overlap on the date of May Fourth, 1919, the day when students marched through Beijing and ransacked the house of a Chinese foreign minister. This overlap captured two conflicting elements of the "1919 moment" in China: its heroism and its melancholy. It was

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<sup>5</sup> For the global meaning of this political "May Fourth," see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 99-118.

<sup>6</sup> For the intellectual and cultural significance of China's transition from the center of "all under heaven" to a "nation-state," see Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968). For the political impact of this transition, see John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Li Zehou, "Qimeng yu jiuwang de shuangchong bianzhou," in *Zhongguo xiandai sixiang shilun* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2008). For a summary of Li Zehou's argument, see Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, 1-11.

heroic because in 1919 the Chinese—especially the young generation—joined other peoples around the world who were demanding national self-determination.<sup>8</sup> It was melancholic because the Chinese—especially the cultural elites who used to champion “European culture” as the standard of civilization of the modern age—began to entertain doubts about the supremacy of the West.<sup>9</sup>

In this chapter, I will focus on the melancholy of the “1919 moment” in China. Instead of rehearsing what has already been said on China’s role in developing multilateral diplomacy and the founding of the League of Nations, I will examine a shift in the Chinese world-view based on two concepts: the hierarchy in time that was popular among Chinese intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century, and the hierarchy in space that became dominant after the Versailles Settlement.<sup>10</sup> In the former, the Chinese believed that they must follow the “universal principle” (*gongli* 公理) of human progress that directed humankind to move forward from barbarism to civilization, and from primitive accumulation to industrial production. It stressed connectivity, mobility, and mutual dependence within the global system, and fair and open competition among members of the international community. In the latter, the Chinese thought that they must protect their land and preserve their country’s territorial sovereignty. It emphasized that the Chinese

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<sup>8</sup> See Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 141-158.

<sup>9</sup> See Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, Culture, and Translated Modernity—1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1985), 239-264.

<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere I discuss the differences between these two concepts in “From a Hierarchy in Time to a Hierarchy in Space: The Meanings of Sino-Babylonianism in Early Twentieth Century China,” *Modern China*, 36.2 (2010): 139-169.

must work hard to defend their country's territorial integrity in an increasingly hostile and predatory world.

This shift from connectivity to geo-body did not take place overnight. In fact, it took almost a decade for the Chinese cultural elites to fully comprehend its implications. Nevertheless, this shift was more transformative as the student protest on May Fourth, 1919. It changed the world view of generations of Chinese intellectuals who now (?) saw the system of nation-states as a double-edged sword. To many Chinese, while the nation-state system facilitated national unity and independence around the world, it also privileged the strong and powerful nations over the weak and powerless.

To trace this shift in the Chinese world view, I will examine the discussion about China's role in the world in four journals: *Dixue zazhi* 地學雜誌 (*Journal of Earth Studies*, 1910–37), *Shidi xuebao* 史地學報 (*Journal of Historical Geography*, 1921–26), *Shixue yu dixue* 史學與地理學 (History and Geography, 1926-1928), and *Yugong banyuekan* 禹貢半月刊 (*Chinese Historical Geography*, 1934–37). This comparison will show that China's self-definition in the system of nation-states underwent tremendous changes in the 1920s and 1930s after the Versailles Settlement. In the 1910s when Zhang Xiangwen 張相文 (1866–1933) founded the first Chinese geographic organization, *Zhongguo dixue hui* 中國地學會 (Chinese Association for the Studies of the Earth) in the Beijing-Tianjin area, and published the first Chinese geographical journal, *Dixue zazhi*, China was in the process of adopting what Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen called “the myth of the nation-state.” It is a myth because it assumes that “cultural identities (nations) coincide with political sovereign entities (states) to create a series of

internally unified and essentially equal units.”<sup>11</sup> Adopting the European argument for social evolution and open competition, many Chinese concluded that forming a nation-state was the only way to be a member of the modern world. For them, nation-state was a “measurement of civilization” in the early twentieth century, and China had no choice but to follow the “universal principle” in order to join the “civilized community.”<sup>12</sup>

In the 1920s, this belief in joining the civilized community by participating in fair and open competitions was greatly challenged. Disillusioned by China’s unfair treatments in the Versailles Settlement, the Chinese ended what Xu Guoqi calls “an age of innocence” in international relations.<sup>13</sup> Having aspired to be a member of the civilized community by adopting the Western political and social norms, the Chinese now discovered that the nation-state system was not fair and open; rather, it was dominated by Western powers eager to protect their own interests at all costs. During the eight years (1921–28) when *Shidi xuebao* and *Shixue yu dixue* were published in Nanjing, the capital of the Guomintang government, the Chinese realized that

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<sup>11</sup> Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 8

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of how the standard of civilization shaped the international relations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of ‘Civilization’ in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). Elsewhere I have discussed how the Chinese responded to the standard of civilization. See Han Ziqi 韓子奇 (Hon Tze-ki), “Jinru shijie de cuozhe yu ziyou—Ershi shiji chude *Dexue zazhi*,” *Xin Shixue* 19.2 (June 2008): 156–66.

<sup>13</sup> Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, 15–16.

Westernization alone would not win them recognition in international affairs. Instead, they focused on recovering national sovereignty through diplomatic negotiations and treaty revisions. Paradoxically they believed that although the nation-state system was a tool used by the Western powers to control the world, the system allowed a discussion of national sovereignty as expounded in Wilson's Fourteen Points.<sup>14</sup> To them, the only way to beat the system was to protect China's territorial sovereignty.

In the early 1930s, as the threat of the Japanese encroachment intensified, the Chinese increasingly fixated on territorial sovereignty. Rather than viewing the nation-state system as an advanced stage of human evolution, they saw it as the tool of the imperialists to dominate the world. As Prasenjit Duara points out, this shift from joining global evolution to protecting China's geo-body fueled an intense anti-imperialist nationalism in China, even though the Chinese were still determined to building a strong nation-state as a symbol of modernity.<sup>15</sup> In the 1930s, no other academic journal expressed this anti-imperialist nationalism more vividly and forcefully than *Yugong banyuekan*, which publicly condemned the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and urged the Chinese to protect their country with blood. Beneath their actions, and

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<sup>14</sup> For an account of Chinese mixed feelings about the nation-state system after WWI, see Xu Guoxi, *China and the Great War*, 244-77.

<sup>15</sup> Prasenjit Duara, "Transnationalism and the Predicament of Sovereignty: China, 1900-1945," *American Historical Review* 102.4 (October 1997): pp. 1030-51; Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 1-40.

perhaps unbeknownst to the student activists, lay a powerful paradigmatic shift in how Chinese viewed the world and their relationship to the system of nation-states

### The Globe as Open Space

Even though in the 1930s the Chinese anti-imperialist nationalism was targeted at Japan, we should keep in mind that as neighbors in East Asia, China and Japan faced similar problems in finding their roles in the nation-state system. Focused on the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), Shogo Suzuki calls our attention to the predicament that Chinese and Japanese leaders faced since the mid-nineteenth century. On the one hand, to join the international community, they must transform their countries politically and economically to meet the “standard of civilization” set down by the Western powers. On the other hand, to succeed in the international community, they must challenge its “rules of the game” that were designed to hamper the competitiveness of new-comers.<sup>16</sup> Driven in turn by what Suzuki calls the “light side” and “dark side” of the Eurocentric global system, Chinese and Japanese leaders were put in a situation where they must be simultaneously pro-Western and anti-Western, partners and rivals.<sup>17</sup>

In East Asia, this process of socialization began after the First Opium War (1838-42) when European powers forced their way into China and secured their interests by obtaining concessions and extraterritoriality. A decade later, in 1853-54, the arrival of Commodore Perry

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<sup>16</sup> Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1–10.

<sup>17</sup> For the significance of Suzuki's argument, see Richard Little's introduction to *Civilization and Empire*, xiv-xvi.



in Tokyo Bay opened Japan to the world. While different in some respects, China and Japan shared a similar path in which they had to substantially change their political and economic systems to gain recognition as members of the international community.<sup>18</sup> Thus, from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, multilateralism was at the core of the two countries' foreign policy. For China, Japan's success in ending extraterritoriality in 1894 and in forming an alliance with Britain in 1902 proved that multilateralism was effective in keeping peace in the world and in allowing mobility in the global system. Hence, from 1895 to 1915, China saw Japan as a model of "East Asian(?) modernity" and sent thousands of its brightest students to schools in Japan.

To highlight the close relationship between China and Japan during this time, Douglas Reynolds calls these ten years "the golden decade" of Sino-Japanese relations.<sup>19</sup> The period was golden not only because it was in sharp contrast to what happened later when the two countries went to war in the 1930s and 1940s. More important, it was golden because China and Japan were closely tied to a network of cultural and technology sharing to build an "East Asian modernity." What drove this cultural and technological network was the belief that East Asia

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<sup>18</sup> The classic works on the common path of socialization are Gerritt W. Gong, *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) and Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

For a historical reflection on China's and Japan's internationalization, see Akira Iriye, *China and Japan in Global Setting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1993), 1-39.

(encompassing China, Japan, and Korea) was a region with a unique culture and history that could achieve a modernity equal to, but different from, Europe and the United States. A striking characteristic of this network was that it was centered in Japan rather than in China, practically destabilizing the Sino-centric tributary system that had been dominant in East Asia in previous centuries.<sup>20</sup>

The “golden decade” ended abruptly in 1915 when the Japanese government presented the Twenty-One Demands to Yuan Shikai, the president of the young Republic of China, demanding a guarantee of its interests in Shandong after the Japanese soldiers took over German colonies in the province. The Shandong issue snowballed into a major international controversy when WWI ended. As mentioned earlier, in the Versailles Settlement, the Allied Powers gave the former German colonies in Shandong to Japan. Subsequently the decision caused popular uproars in China, especially student protests in Beijing, later known as the May Fourth Movement.

Like other journals in China at the beginning of the twentieth century, *Dixue zazhi* captured the turn-of-the-century optimism about an open international system and an East-Asian modernity. In their pronouncement of publishing the journal, the leaders of the Chinese Association for the Studies of the Earth were explicit in expressing their intention to examine the

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<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere I discuss the significance of this East Asian network of knowledge and technology sharing. See Tze-ki Hon, “Technology, Markets, and Social Change: Print Capitalism in Early Twentieth-Century China,” in *Print, Profit, and Perception: Ideas, Information, and Knowledge in Chinese societies, 1895-1949*, edited by Pei-yin Lin and Wei-pin Tsai (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 92–113.

nation-state system. For this reason, in *Dixue zazhi* the term *dixue* 地學 literally meant the studies (*xue*) of the earth (*di*). It included the geological studies of rock formation and the location of mountain ranges, maps of countries and cities, meteorological studies of weather patterns, new mining techniques, and global systems of commerce, communication, and cultural exchange.<sup>21</sup> In short, the scope of *dixue* was the entire globe, and its goal was to find out how the globe was connected through various physical and human networks.

This global scope of *dixue* is clearly shown in Xiong Bingsui's 熊秉穗 article, "Zhongguo zhongzu kao" 中國種族考 (A Study of the Chinese Race). On the surface, the article appears to be another attempt to support the alleged migration of the Chinese from Mesopotamia. Commonly known as "Sino-Babylonianism" or "Xilai shuo" 西來說 (The Theory of the Western Origins of Chinese Civilization) promoted by Terrien de Lacouperie (1845–94). Lacouperie argued that the Chinese were descendants of the Bak tribe who migrated to China from Mesopotamia in prehistoric time.<sup>22</sup> Based on meticulous textual studies, he demonstrated that the Chinese classic *Yijing* (Book of Changes) was a Babylonian dictionary, containing the hidden code of an advanced civilization outside China.<sup>23</sup> In the early 1900s, Lacouperie's argument was

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<sup>21</sup> In the first year of its publication, *Dixue zazhi* carried a large variety of articles including essays about rock formation, weather patterns, mining technology, the opening of the Suez Canal, and the railroad system. See especially *Dixue zazhi* 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4.

<sup>22</sup> Terrien de Lacouperie, *Western Origin of the Western Early Chinese Civilisation* (London: Asher, 1893), 1–8.

<sup>23</sup> Terrien de Lacouperie, *The Oldest book of the Chinese, the Yh-king, and Its Author* (London: D. Nutt, 1892), pp. v–xix; *Western Origin*, 16–19.

introduced to the Chinese through the summaries of two Japanese journalists, Shirakawa Jirō 白河次郎 and Kokubu Tanenori 國府種徳. Preposterous as it may seem from today's perspective, Lacouperie's argument was warmly accepted by Chinese nationalists such as Deng Shi 鄧實 (1877–1945), Huang Jie 黃節 (1873–1935), Liu Shiwei 劉師培 (1884–1919), and Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869–1935), who promoted Sino-Babylonianism to support an anti-Manchu revolution. They argued that because the Han Chinese were originally migrants from Mesopotamia, they should have the physical strength and the mental toughness to start a revolution against their oppressors. As descendants of the Yellow Emperor, the first Chinese king of the migrants from Mesopotamia, they must have faith in themselves in creating their own country.<sup>24</sup>

Contrary to the nationalists at the turn of the twentieth century, Xiong Bingsui 熊秉穗 did not use Sino-Babylonianism as a political weapon. He flatly rejected Deng Shi and Huang

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<sup>24</sup> Kai-wing Chow, "Imagining Boundaries of Blood: Zhang Binglin and the Invention of the Han 'Race' in Modern China," in *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, ed. Frank Dikötter (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 34–52; Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 116–23; John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 67–88; Shen Songqiao, "Wo yi wo xue jian xuan yuan: Huangdi shenhua yu wanqing de guozu piango," *Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan* 28.2 (1997): 1–77; Tze-ki Hon, "From a Hierarchy in Time to a Hierarchy in Space: Meanings of Sino-Babylonianism in Early 20th Century China," *Modern China*, 36.2 (2010): 139–69.

Jie's argument that the Han Chinese were "descendants of the Yellow Emperor."<sup>25</sup> Instead, Xiong saw a deeper meaning in Lacouperie's Sino-Babylonianism. In addition to showing a racial genealogy from the Yellow Emperor to contemporary Han Chinese, Sino-Babylonianism revealed the complex networks of human migration that began in prehistoric times and continued to the present. For Xiong, the migration of the Bak tribe to China was merely an example of the constant flow of people across Eurasia. More important, migrants were often stronger and more determined to succeed in difficult conditions.<sup>26</sup> Not only did they have to adapt and adjust to the new environment, they also had to compete with the locals in controlling land and resources.

Thus, for Xiong, the migration of the Bak tribe to China was an episode of global significance. First, it demonstrated that since prehistoric times there had been constant movement of people from continent to continent, forming multiethnic communities in various parts of the world. Because of the high volume of migration, racial mixing amid racial competition had been the driving force of history. Second, for contemporary Chinese, the migration of the Bak tribe underscored the importance of coming to terms with the age of imperialism and colonialism. As Europeans were migrating to East Asia in droves through imperialist expansion and colonial rule, they would soon be the new rulers of East Asia if the natives could not match their competitiveness and military prowess.

The same global scope is also found in Bai Yueheng's 白月恆 article "Liding xingzheng qu beikao" 釐定行政區備考 (Notes on Dividing the Administrative Districts, 1912). Throughout human history, Bai suggested, constant attempts had been made to match political boundaries

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<sup>25</sup> Xiong Bingsui, "Zhongguo zhongzu kao," *Dixue zazhi* 18 (1911): 1a–12b; 3–4 (1912): 1a.

<sup>26</sup> Xiong Bingsui, "Zhongguo zhongzu kao," *Dixue zazhi* 18 (1911): 3b.

with natural boundaries. When a political boundary follows “the division in mountains and the unity in rivers” (*shanli shuihe* 山離水合), he said, it renders what is invisible visible, making the natural boundary clear and concrete. When a political boundary allows an effective use of natural resources, he asserted, it creates “peace to the country and prosperity to the people” (*guotai minan* 國泰民安).<sup>27</sup> In China, Bai argued, throughout history political leaders had made many attempts to match human geography with natural geography.

But Bai considered that the success of the 1911 Revolution provided an important opportunity for rethinking and remaking the political divisions in China.<sup>28</sup> Unlike previous attempts, he argued, the goal of restructuring the administrative districts after 1911 was not to give the central government more control over the local areas, or to expand the bureaucracy to remote places. Rather, the political reorganization was to reflect the characteristics of natural geography and to facilitate the movement of people and goods. The new political division, Bai suggested, should “model after nature” (*biao zhun zai hu tian* 標準在乎天), focusing on expanding existing networks that connected the local market to regional and global markets. Its goal was to serve China as well as the world, making the country more connected to the global system of circulation, consumption and production.<sup>29</sup>

## The Unjust World after World War I

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<sup>27</sup> Bai Yueheng, “Liding xingzheng qu beikao,” *Dixue zazhi* 7–8 (1912): 1a.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1b.

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However, some Chinese intellectuals began to question this sanguine view of global circulation after witnessing the horrific destruction in WWI. The scholar-journalist Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), for instance, wrote a moving memoir after touring war-torn Europe in 1919. In his memoir, Liang not only chronicled the massive destruction of “the Great War,” but also used the destruction in Europe to proclaim the end of “the dream of the omnipotence of science” (*kexue wanneng zhimeng* 科學萬能之夢).<sup>30</sup> For Liang, scientific development had proven to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, scientific discoveries produced large quantities of consumer goods, built a global network of communication and transportation, and improved the living condition of human beings. On the other hand, scientific discoveries created lethal weapons that could wipe out human civilization and caused pain and anguish to millions of people. More important, Liang discovered that the Westphalian system of nation-states was unable to guarantee justice and fairness in international politics. Citing the decision of the Allied Powers to give the German colonies in Shandong to Japan, Liang saw the end of “the sweet dream of human justice” (*zhengyi rendao de haomeng* 正義人道的好夢).<sup>31</sup> Rather than redrawing the map of the world based on a mutual respect for national sovereignty and a careful consideration of existing networks of connectivity, Liang found that the victorious Western powers used the Versailles Settlement to settle scores and to pursue their own interests.

For many Chinese readers, the most revealing part of Liang’s memoir was a brief conversation between Liang and an American writer. First, the American writer asked Liang

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<sup>30</sup> See Liang Qichao, “*Ouyou xinying lu*” in *Liang Qichao youji* (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2006), 13-15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

what he would bring back to China from Europe. Liang answered that he would bring Western civilization to China to enlighten his countrymen. The American writer sighed after hearing Liang's answer. He told Liang that it was pointless to bring Western civilization to China because it had already proven to be bankrupted. In return, Liang asked what the American writer would do after returning home. Surprisingly the American writer told Liang that he would stay home to wait for Chinese civilization to save his country.<sup>32</sup>

While the conversation might be fictive, Liang underscored the fact that WWI was indeed a major change in human history. Clearly shown in the massive destruction and the tremendous loss of lives, Liang drew attention to the negative impact of European material progress that culminated in "the Great War." Liang showed that the material progress (particularly in armaments and war strategies) did not improve human civilization; on the contrary, it destroyed the world. In contrast, Chinese civilization might be slow in producing material goods, but it promoted a balanced view toward nature and harmony in society.<sup>33</sup>

This change in the perception of the West was clearly expressed in *Shidi xuebao*. Based in Nanjing, the capital of the Guomindang government, *Shidi xuebao* was published by Southeastern University (*Dongnan daxue* 東南大學). Led by an eclectic group of scholars including foreign-trained scientists (e.g., Xu Zeling 徐則陵 and Zhu Kezhen 竺可楨), late-Qing philologists (e.g., Liu Yizheng 柳誼徵), and graduates of Southeastern University (e.g., Miao Fenglin 繆鳳林 and Zhang Qiyun 張其昀), *Shidi xuebao* was a professional journal aimed at

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 5-6.



scholars in the academy and a small/large(?) circle of learned readers in society. By combining history with geography, the editors of *Shidi xuebao* claimed that they were creating a hybrid discipline that would give a comprehensive account of “human development” (*renshi zhi tuibian* 人事之蛻變).<sup>34</sup>

In their writings, the writers of *Shidi xuebao* showed a deep interest in China’s role in the global system after WWI. Disillusioned by the decision of the Allied powers to transfer the German colonies in Shandong to Japan, they saw the Versailles Settlement as an attempt by Britain, France, and Italy to preserve their power. Despite the promise of national liberation and national sovereignty in Wilson’s Fourteen Points, they interpreted the creation of the League of Nations as a ploy of the Western imperial powers. Rather than a facilitator of multilateralism, they viewed the League of Nations as a gatekeeper, preserving the supremacy of the European countries and stopping the non-Western countries from gaining national independence. For this reason, they consciously promoted their journal as a public forum for “contemporary issues” (*xindai wenti* 現代問題), exposing the paradoxes of the nation-state system as a symbol of modernity.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In referring to human development, the writers of *Shidi xuebao* deliberately avoided using terms that implied linear progression (e.g., *jinhua* 進化). Instead, they used terms such as *tuibian* 蛻變 (transform and change) and *yanhua* 演化 (evolve and change) to stress the continuity in change in human civilization. For the meaning of *yanhua*, see Miao Fenglin, “Zhongguo shi zhi xuanchuan,” *Shidi xuebao* 1.2 (1921): 209–13.

<sup>35</sup> *Shidi xuebao* editors, “Bianji daoyan,” *Shidi xuebao* 2.1 (1922): 1–2.

Of the writers of *Shidi xuebao*, the meteorologist Zhu Kezhen was most/especially vocal in condemning the Versailles Settlement. In an article reporting the developments in post-WWI Europe, Zhu criticized the Allied Powers for harshly punishing the Germans and unfairly dividing the lands of the crumbled Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>36</sup> In another article, he continued his critique of the Versailles Settlement by chronicling the transfer of power from Germany to Japan in Qingdao. In the article, he showed how a decision that was made behind closed doors in Versailles had disastrous consequences to people in Shandong and all of China. By revealing how unjust the world had become after WWI, Zhu underscored the importance of knowing China's territorial boundaries. To make his point, he accused the late Qing officials of giving away territories that they had no knowledge of, such as Li Hongzhang's decision to cede Taiwan to Japan in 1895.<sup>37</sup>

In the early 1920s, Zhu Kezhen's view was particularly poignant when misinformation—especially whether China's territorial boundaries include Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang—was a means for winning political gains. A case in point was the Washington Conference of 1921, where nine nations, including Japan, met in Washington, D.C., to negotiate their interests in the Pacific and East Asia. In addition to naval treaties signed by the United States, Britain, and Japan, the status of Manchuria was discussed as part of the sphere of influence of Japan in East Asia. Not being given a role at the conference, the Chinese saw a repeat of the Versailles Settlement where decisions were made without consulting China. In responding to what appeared to be another loss of territorial sovereignty, Miao Fenglin wrote an

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<sup>36</sup> Zhu Kezhen, "Ouzhou zhanhou zhi xin xingshi," *Shidi xuebao* 1.1 (1921): 163.

<sup>37</sup> Zhu Kezhen, "Qingdao jieshou zhi qingxing," *Shidi xuebao* 2.2 (1922): 90.

article affirming Chinese sovereignty over Manchuria. To counter the Japanese claim, Miao used historical documents (such as the *Yugong*, Tribute to Yu), to prove that Manchuria had been part of Chinese territory for thousands of years.<sup>38</sup> Here, we see a sea change in the Chinese perception of the global system of nation-states. In the 1910s, they saw the system as a collection of hybrid networks of physical and human connectivity, facilitating labor migration, capital movement, and information sharing. In the 1920s, however, they saw the system as patches of “geo-bodies,” dividing the earth into distinct territorial units safeguarded by armed forces.

Two examples further elucidate this change of view. One is the status of Pianma 片馬, a patch of land on the border between China and Burma. In Zhao Xiangyuan’s 趙祥瑗 article “Pianma wenti de yanjiu” 片馬問題的研究 (A Study of the Question of Pianma, 1922), he traced the complicated history between the Chinese southwest and Burma.<sup>39</sup> Particularly, he centered on the relations between the Chinese province of Yunnan and Burma, which were closely connected by migration, trade, and cultural links. Zhao’s goal was not to retell the past, but to use the past to clarify China’s interest in Indo-China, where Britain and France were major

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<sup>38</sup> Miao Fenglin, “Zhongguo shi zhi xuanchuan,” 212.

<sup>39</sup> Showing how greatly territorial boundaries had dominated the discussion of historical geography, *Dixue zazhi* also gave prominent coverage to the historical significance and national interest in the “Pianma Question.” See Wang Longzhang, “Pianma wenti,” *Dixue zazhi* 1–2 (1923): 147–55; “Pianma jiaoshe zhong zhi Yunnan tongdian,” *Dixue zazhi* 3–4 (1923): 3–4; 1 (1929): 16–28; 2 (1929): 153–70. On the Pianma controversy, see also Bai Weichu, “Pianma kou,” *Dixue zazhi* 2 (1928): 161–82; 1 (1929): 16–28; 2 (1929): 153–70; 1 (1930): 35–50; 2 (1930): 162–81.

players. For him, the question was what China should do to forestall British expansion in the region when the integrity of China's territorial sovereignty was threatened.<sup>40</sup>

The second example was the relationship between northern and southern China. In Miao Fenglin's article, "Zhongguo shi zhi xuanchuan" 中國史之宣傳 (The Propaganda of Chinese History, 1921), he responded to a plan by foreign strategists to divide China into two halves along the Yangtze River. To refute the Westerners' plan, he used historical evidence to prove that the north-south division was temporary throughout Chinese history. It appeared only twice, during the Age of Division (316–589) and the Southern Song period (1127–1279), and in both instances the division paved the way for national unification.<sup>41</sup>

These two examples show an acute sense of insecurity among Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s. Overwhelmed by foreign threats in Manchuria and the southwest, they saw their country under siege. They felt that foreign powers, particularly Japan and Britain, were ready to take over China. In their mind, they were reminded of the "1919 moment" when the Allied Powers partitioned the lands of the crumbled Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires in the name of

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<sup>40</sup> Zhao Xiangyuan, "Pianma wenti de yanjiu," *Shidi xuebao* 2.4 (1922): 109–21. See also Peng Minghui, *Lishi dili yu xiandai Zhongguo shixue* (Taipei: Tongdai tushu gufan youxian gongsi, 1995), 131.

<sup>41</sup> Miao Fenglin, "Zhongguo shi zhi xuanchuan," 212.

promoting national independence.<sup>42</sup> They feared that this version of the “1919 moment” would soon visit China if they did not do enough to protect their country’s territorial sovereignty.

### Protecting the Nation’s Territory

Founded in 1934 in Beiping (today’s Beijing), *Yugong Banyuekan* attempted to defend Chinese territorial sovereignty when the country was threatened by the full force of Japanese invasion. In the journal’s “Statement of Publication” (*fa kan ci* 發刊詞) Tan Qixiang (one of the chief editors) saw the possibility of the end of China. He believed that China would soon be turned into a colony of Japan, as Korea and Manchuria had been in 1910 and 1931 respectively.<sup>43</sup>

Compared with the writings of Miao Fenglin and Zhu Kezhen of the early 1920s, Tan’s passage expressed and even more radical and bellicose form of anti-colonial nationalism. In the 1920s, Miao Fenglin and Zhu Kezhen were not shy from relating their discussions of geography to contemporary political affairs such as the Versailles Settlement and the Washington Conference. Nonetheless, they did not explicitly advocate taking up arms to protect China’s territory. In contrast, Tan Qixiang was deeply concerned by threats to the security of China. He was worried that the Chinese nation would soon be absorbed into the rapidly expanding Japanese Empire. To support his argument, he called attention to the political implication of the term “China Proper,” frequently used by Japanese scholars in the late 1920s and 1930s. He cautioned

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<sup>42</sup> For a study of how the League of Nations decided on the territories and the peoples of the crumbled empires, see Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 17-106.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

his readers that the Japanese were making plans to annex Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet, which were outside of “China Proper,” the land where Han Chinese lived.

Of the writers in *Yugong Banyuekan*, Feng Jiasheng 馮家昇 (1904–70) was the most articulate in highlighting the importance of protecting China’s territorial boundaries. In a series of essays on Manchuria, Feng underscored the importance of “the study of the borders” (*bianjiang zhi xue* 邊疆之學).<sup>44</sup> In discussing the loss of Manchuria to the Japanese, Feng put the blame on the Nanjing government and the warlords. To prevent any further loss of land, Feng emphasized the importance of national defense and demanded the Chinese government to clearly mark the country’s territories. To him, the goal of clarifying China’s national boundary was not merely about rock formations, mountain ranges, weather patterns, or waterways. Rather, it was part of a struggle against imperialism. When the imperialists spread false information, such as that about the purported externality of the northern and western frontiers, to gain land and resources in China, Feng argued, the Chinese scholars must protect their country’s sovereignty by providing counter arguments. Like guns and tanks in the battle field, a knowledge of China’s territory would help defend the nation against intruders. In a hostile world where the strong bullied the weak, the countries armed with a sophisticated knowledge of their boundaries would have a better chance to defend their territorial sovereignty.<sup>45</sup>

If indeed the Chinese had lost the battle over Manchuria, Feng warned his countrymen that they should focus their attention on the next round in a great war—the struggle over East Asia. Feng wrote,

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<sup>44</sup> Feng Jiasheng, “Wode yanjiu dongbei shidi de jihua,” *Yu Gong banyuekan* 1.10 (1934): 2.

<sup>45</sup> Feng Jiasheng, “Dongbei shide yanjiu zhi yiyou chengji,” *Yugong banyuekan* 2.10 (1935): 2.

Before the Sino-Japanese War [of 1894–95], the Japanese scholars created a field of study called the “Korean Studies.” Shortly afterward, Korea was annexed [to the Japanese Empire in 1910]. Before the Russo-Japanese War [in 1904–5], the Japanese scholars created a field of study called the “Manchuria and Korean Studies.” Shortly afterward, the Liaodong province was fallen. Before the September 18th [the Mukden Incident of 1931], the Japanese scholars created a field of study called the “Manchurian and Mongolian Studies.” Shortly afterward, the four provinces [in Manchuria] were annexed. Nowadays, the Japanese are energetically promoting the “East Asian Studies.” Looking at the direction of their swords, it is clear our country is in grave danger. Let’s see who will rule East Asia. Countrymen, it is time to wake up!<sup>46</sup>

Partly a heuristic device to mobilize the readers, the last sentence in the quote (“Countrymen, it is time to wake up!”) highlighted the acute sense of Chinese vulnerability. At a time when the nation-state system was unable to resolve the contradiction between national independence and imperialist expansion, and between national sovereignty and the domination of colonial powers, “anti-imperialistic nationalism” became an effective tool of mobilization. Within the country, it offered a convincing argument to mobilize citizens to defend the nation and to make selfless

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<sup>46</sup> Feng Jiasheng, “Riren duiyu wo dongbei de yanjiu jinkuang,” *Yu Gong banyuekan* 5.6 (1936):

sacrifice. As in a famous line by Gu Jiegang and Shi Nianhai in 1938, the purpose of clarifying China's boundary was "not to allow enemies to take away an inch of our land."<sup>47</sup>

### The Paradoxes of the Nation-state System

This study has shown the long-term impact of the "1919 moment" on the Chinese perception of the nation-state system. As revealed in the doubling of "May Fourth," the "1919 moment" in China was full of ambiguity and anguish. It was a protest against the unfair treatment by the Allied Powers toward China at Versailles, and a pivotal change in the Chinese understanding of the international system.

For many Chinese in the early twentieth century, the nation-state system was full of contradictions and incongruities. On the one hand, it was a "measurement of civilization" in a *hierarchy in time* denoting human progress from barbarism to civilization, and from primitive production to industrial manufacturing. As a measurement of civilization, the nation-state system invited everyone—Africans, Asians, Europeans—to join the global march to achieve "liberty, fraternity, and equality." On the other hand, especially after WWI, the nation-state system became a symbol of a *hierarchy in space* in which strong nations acquired more land and resources at the expense of weak nations. The geographical size of a nation became a measurement of wealth and a symbol of power.

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<sup>47</sup> Gu Jiegang and Shi Nianhai, *Zhongguo jiangyu yange shi* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1938), 4. The original line is, "雖一寸山河，亦不當輕易付諸敵人" (We will not easily let enemies to take away one inch of our territory).



Driving this tension between connectivity and geo-body was the conflict between the lofty goal of safeguarding the national independence of all legitimate nations, as eloquently spelled out in Wilson's Fourteen Points, and the harsh (if not dark) reality of the imperialism where strong nations continued to invade and occupy the land of weak nations.<sup>48</sup> One may say that this conflict had existed long before WWI. But for the Chinese, especially the cultural elites, this conflict became apparent in the Versailles Settlement where the Allied Powers decided to give the German colonies in Shandong to Japan.

As shown in this study, it was the tension between a hierarchy in time and a hierarchy in space that was pivotal to the change in how the Chinese looked at Japan. When the Chinese understood the nation-state system as a hierarchy in time for human evolution, China would join the community of nation-states by modeling itself after Japan's "East Asian modernity." When the Chinese understood the nation-state system as a hierarchy in space for acquiring wealth and land, they saw Japan as an aggressor and a competitor. With this understanding, we must look at Chinese nationalism more carefully. Before we blame the Chinese for narrowing their horizon and adopting a victim mentality, we should first examine the nation-state system that caused confusion and frustration due to its conflicting goals.

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<sup>48</sup> For a thoughtful discussion of this tension between supporting national independence and supporting imperialism, see Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 93-126.

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