CHAPTER FIVE

From *Tian Xia* to Sovereignty

The Shift of the Chinese Imaginary of Connectivity in the Nineteenth Century

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Introduction

There is an old tale about the genesis of the Chinese political system: Approximately 3,000 years ago, when the Mycenean age was coming to an end and the Western part of the world was witnessing the rise of the classic Greek civilization, in the Middle Kingdom of the Eastern hemisphere, a small tribe known as the Zhou rebelled against the ruling elites of the Shang, overthrew the polity, and eventually established a dynasty that lasted longer than any other Chinese dynasties that have ever existed.[1] Upon the success of their revolution, the rulers of Zhou were faced with one major question, that is, how to establish a lasting form of governance? At that time, there were more than 1,000 culturally and ethnically different tribes in China. In order to ensure the absolute harmony among those tribes, King Cheng of Zhou then argued that the only way to govern the new polity was to make it "an open network" where any tribe could participate as long as it could be at peace with the existing ones (Zhao 2009, 8). There would be one "world government" that overlooks the well-being of each tribe and is responsible for the allocations of wealth and resources. All tribes were independent of each other in terms of their economic output and cultural and social values; and yet, they all share the universal political obligations to the central government. The rulers of Zhou also sincerely believed that it was "天 (tian),"

1 The Zhou reigned for about 800 years.

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meaning "Heaven," that had given the Zhou a mandate to rule (Keightley; cited in Loewe and Shaughnessy 1999). Accordingly, they called their system of governance: "天下 (tian xia)," namely, "all under heaven."

This chapter is about a changing Chinese imaginary of connectivity in the nineteenth century; but it is also about how a foreign idea became transplanted into the minds of Chinese people amid the country's evolving relationship with the rest of the world. It is often argued that China had never encountered anything resembling the "international" prior to its interaction with the European powers in the nineteenth century (Chen 1987, 57). By this I do not mean that Chinese people had never met any Europeans prior to the first Opium War—such a claim would be factually incorrect as the initial encounter between Europe and China can be traced as far back to the sixteenth century when the Jesuit missionaries went to China in an attempt to spread Christianity. What China had indeed never experienced, however, was the idea of "international" as a novel form of political order that is based on the independence of and equality among states. The European-dominated modern state system presented China with considerable challenges, as it was antithetical to the traditional Chinese conception of world order that implies hierarchy and inequality among individual nations. Historians—whether Chinese or Western, radical or conservative—hence regard the Opium War as the starting point of modern China, as it highlights not only the first successful attempt made by foreign powers to penetrate China's self-sufficient economy but also the collapse of the Confucian worldview that had prevailed in Chinese political thinking for millennia (Chan 1999). As such, in the first half of the nineteenth century, China began a series of social, political, and intellectual transformations that ended up changing the country forever.

The main aim of this chapter is to tell a story of one of those transformations. Specifically, it will illustrate how in a span of less than half a century, the traditional Confucian view of hierarchical world order was replaced in Chinese imagination by the Western conception of international society that presupposes mutual recognitions of state *sovereignty*. Few concepts are as central to the disciplinary debates of international relations (IR) as the notion of "sovereignty."[2] However, it was not until the late nineteenth

2 There is a considerable amount of research on the concept of "sovereignty." Katzenstein (1996, 515), for instance, argues that although the logic of sovereignty seems to be taken for granted in realism, "it is not a natural fact of international life. Instead it is politically contested and has variable political effects." Bartelson (1995) also wrote a genealogy of the concept and showed how sovereignty is bound up in knowledge practices. For more on debates on sovereignty, see Bartelson (1995) and Katzenstein (1996).

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century when Western knowledge and technology were introduced into the country that the concept began to be known by the Chinese people for the first time. The present chapter hence attempts to explain the process of introducing the concept of sovereignty into Chinese discourse as well as some of the consequences of this conceptual transplanting. The first section will briefly outline the concept of "天下 (tian xia)," that is, "all under heaven," and explain how this Chinese understanding of connectivity was subverted and eventually replaced by the Western idea of sovereignty after China's heavy defeat in the Opium Wars. The second section will then discuss the consequences of this change in the Chinese political imaginary. It will argue that, while the introduction of the notion of sovereignty enabled China to effectively defend itself against Western imperialism, the internalization of the modern conception of statehood has also led to the rise of essentialism in Chinese intellectual discourse.

The Collapse of *Tian Xia* and the Emergence of Modern Sovereignty in Chinese Political Imaginary

Scholars of international relations (IR) are not foreign to the Chinese concept of "天下 (tian xia)." In 2005, Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang famously proposed the term as a new analytical concept for the discipline of IR, and since then, the concept has been a topical theme for discussion among both Chinese and Western scholars. Although the concept of "天下 (tian xia)" did not appear in IR discourse until 2005, it is in fact one of the most frequently adopted concepts in ancient Chinese texts. In *Mencius* (2010), for example, one passage reads,

> Thus, it can be said that people cannot be controlled simply by closing the borders; a state cannot be protected simply by being surrounded by steep mountains and a raging torrent; all under heaven ("天下 (tian xia)") cannot be conquered simply by using forces [my translation].

A common translation of the Chinese concept of "天下 (tian xia)" is "all under heaven." The most significant contribution of the concept to the disciplinary debates of IR lies in that it connotes a radically different view of connectivity from that of the Westphalian state system. Unlike the Westphalian system that stresses the equality of each individual state, Chinese "天下 (tian xia)" emphasizes a family-state system that favors hierarchy (Zhao 2005). In his book, Zhao outlines four theoretical underpinnings of

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the Chinese "天下 (tian xia)" that distinguish the concept from the Westphalian system:

1. The world must be seen as a political entity under a commonly agreed institution;
2. The world should be the highest level of political measurement; from the perspective of international relations, this means that *world affairs and issues should be analyzed by a world standard, not a nation-state standard*;
3. Political institutions at each level must be of the same essence. The political principle must be able to be universalized and transitively run through all political levels;
4. The legitimacy of a political institution should be rooted in the ethical [my translation and emphasis].

According to Zhao (2005, 2006), the world governed by the state system is a "non-world," for interstate institutions cannot solve trans-state problems. The "天下 (tian xia)" system, on the other hand, sees "the whole world as one family" and therefore is capable of creating a global system, thus solving global problems (Zhao 2006, 31). In other words, in contrast to the Westphalian system where nation-states are deemed as the primary actors in the international system, the Chinese "天下 (tian xia)" defines a political order that sees and analyzes the world as one totality—namely, borderless.

One important implication of such a Chinese imaginary of borderless world is that, unlike the Westphalian system where the boundary between "self" and "other" is clearly delineated through the idea of territory, the Chinese "天下 (tian xia)" implies a much more ambiguous relation between self and other. This is most clearly manifested in China's relations with foreign countries: Looking back in history, it can be noticed that up till its encounter with the Europeans, China had had a long history of absorbing and assimilating foreigners; "barbarians" who came to reign over the Chinese heartland, such as Mongols and Manchus, had all been sinicized and assimilated into the mainstream Chinese society one way or another (Chan, 1999). What can be concluded from this Chinese approach to its relations with foreign nations is that, since the concept of "天下 (tian xia)" implies hierarchical relations between individual states, it essentially allows for the more powerful states to absorb the weaker ones and consequently assimilate them into their own cultural, political, and intellectual orbits. In the case of China, especially, the strength and persistence of its cultural identity resulted in the country's sense of

civilizational superiority that in turn serves as what Emilie Durkheim (2014) once called "collective conscience," bonding the Chinese population throughout the history.

This sense of civilizational superiority was finally tested, if not displaced, in the face of the dynamic and expansionist Europe. The Chinese absorption did not work with the Europeans, as they were simply too rich and technologically too advanced. What is more, both the Chinese and the Europeans claimed their own superiority based on different worldviews and consequently, they collided head on. A letter by Griffith John (cited in Thompson 1906, 254) to the London Missionary Society vividly described the irreconcilable identifications between the two cultural groups:

> Are we not much superior to them? Are we not more manly, more intelligent, more skillful, more human, more civilised, nay, are we not more estimable in every way? Yes, according to our way of thinking. No, *emphatically* no, according to theirs. And it would be nearly as difficult to alter out opinion on the subject as it is for them to alter theirs.

European merchants and diplomats repeatedly protested that they were not being treated as "equal" by Chinese traders. Accommodations thus had to be made by the government in order to "tame" the complaining Europeans—on *their* terms and in accordance with *their* understanding of international rules [my emphasis] (Gong 1984). "Self-knowledge develops through knowledge of the Other" (Todorov 1999, 254); for the very first time in their history, China realized that they were speaking from the position of weakness, not of strength.

Europe's scientific advancement as well as overwhelmingly superior military force eventually led Chinese intellectuals to conclude that the only way for them to defend their country against foreign encroachment is to learn from them. As such, from the late 1830s, a growing number of intellectuals and ruling elites began to advocate for the study of Western knowledge. This is also commonly known as the beginning of China's "Western learning." In 1839, an official named Lin Zexu instructed a number of scholars to translate English texts on international law; his intention was to use international law to ban the British merchants from importing opium into the country (Chan 1998). In 1862, an academy named *Tongwenguan* (College of Foreign Languages) was set up by the Qing government, whose main purpose was to train translators to handle foreign affairs. Two years later, Henry Wheaton's *Elements of International Law* was translated by then American missionary W. A. P. Martin and distributed to public officials. The book soon became a primary reference for them to conduct diplomacy (Chan 1998).

The adoption of international law and the country's official involvement in international diplomacy then brought some Western political concepts into China, with the most important one being "sovereignty." What is particularly interesting about the transmission of the concept of sovereignty was that, before the introduction of Wheaton's *Elements of International Law*, the Chinese term for sovereignty, that is, "主权 (zhu quan)," did not possess any meaning that could connote the power of the state. The Chinese expression of sovereignty consists of two characters: "主 (zhu)," meaning ruler, master; and "权 (quan)," which means rights but also power (not in the positive sense of the power of a legitimate authority but in the negative sense of one's privileged position to manipulate rules). Hence, in the premodern Chinese language, or at least before the nineteenth century, "主权 (zhu quan)" means the rights, or power, of the master. In *Guanzi* (2010), a seventh-century BCE political and philosophical text, for example, one paragraph reads,

> If we reward the subjects too much we will risk exhausting the national treasury; if we are too lenient towards the subjects we will risk undermining the authority of the national law. The exhaustion of the national treasury will undermine the power of the monarch ("主权 (zhu quan)"); and the leniency towards the subjects will undermine our national security. Thus, everything has to be balanced and nothing can be overdone. [my translation]

Similarly, in *Qianfulun* (2011), philosopher Wang Fu from the Han Dynasty says,

> Those in power have greed; so they hate those with integrity. Those in power will do anything to hide those with integrity; because they pose threats to the power of the monarch ("主权 (zhu quan)"). [my translation]

In both of these cases, it can be seen that "主权 (zhu quan)" was used to refer to the power of the monarch rather than the authority of the state.

This conception of sovereignty, however, began to change after the publication of the Chinese version of Wheaton's *Elements of International Law*. This is mostly because, when Martin was translating Wheaton's text, he equated the meaning of the Chinese "主权 (zhu quan)" with that of the English "sovereignty." Unlike in the above two texts where "主权 (zhu quan)" was used to describe the power of the monarch, in his translation of Wheaton's text Martin deployed the Chinese term "主权 (zhu quan)" explicitly to translate the English "sovereignty." For example, one passage from Martin's translation reads,

> Thus what is the absolute power of a state, is what we call sovereignty ("主权 (zhu quan)"). Such a sovereignty ("主权 (zhu quan)") can be exercised within the state, or outside of the state. When exercised within the state, it is the highest of all legal orders. When exercised outside of the state, it symbolises the absolute autonomy of the state and also protects the state from any foreign interferences [my translation]. (Wheaton, translated by Martin, 2003, 27)

This was the beginning of the Chinese obsession with the concept of sovereignty. According to political scientist Gerald Chan (1998), when the definition of "主权 (zhu quan)" as the power of the state was first introduced into the Chinese intellectual discourse, it quickly took hold among intellectuals and political elites; Li Hongzhang, one of the most distinguished diplomats in Chinese history and also one of the earliest advocates of the Western learning, for example, allegedly used the concept on many occasions to resist European influence in the Chinese territory. Also, in his study of the Chinese foreign policy in the late Qing period, John Schrecker (1971, 253) discovered a steady increase in the frequency of Chinese officials' employment of the term "sovereignty" in their political rhetoric; from 1875 to 1894, the Chinese term "主权 (zhu quan)," that is, sovereignty, appeared on an average of only once per 100 pages in the Qing government's foreign policy documents. Then between 1895 and 1899 it grew to 2.5 times per 100 pages, and by the period between 1902 and 1910, the frequency soared to about 22 appearances per 100 pages. It was obvious that from the late nineteenth century, sovereignty of the Chinese state had become the prime topic of concern for the Qing government. This also explains why Martin's translation of "sovereignty" is now the default definition for "主权 (zhu quan)" when most of the neologisms he crafted in his translation of Wheaton's book could no longer be found in Chinese discourse today (Callahan 2001): because the introduction of the English concept of sovereignty had led to the shift in the Chinese imaginary of connectivity from the previous borderless "天下 (tian xia)" to the modern international system that consists of bounded territories.

Sheldon Wolin (2004, 218) argues, "The need to establish a field of intelligible meanings among political phenomena become acute when traditional social and political arrangements appear to be breaking down into a kind of primal condition." Indeed, from the rise of continental philosophy in the nineteenth century to the recent revival of Marxism within Western academia, it is almost a truism that every theoretical innovation has to be spurred by moments of crisis – as if human mind became particularly lucid when threatened by its own extinction. This chapter has so far illustrated how the concept of sovereignty became transplanted into Chinese thinking

in the aftermath of the Opium Wars, thus subverting the traditional Chinese imaginary of connectivity. It is probably worth mentioning here that, before the arrival of the Europeans, it was almost unimaginable for Chinese intellectuals to accept any foreign knowledge, since they firmly believed that China had everything and therefore there was no need to borrow anything from the outside world. The shift of Chinese imaginary from "天下 (tian xia)" to modern sovereignty in this sense was highly significant, as it marked China's proactive transition of its knowledge production from Chinese to Western precedents or what Leigh Jenco (2015, 4) calls "the painful process of de-parochialisation": that is, the realization that one's norms and values that were formerly presumed as universal and incontroversiable turned out to be particular, thus insufficient.

What, however, needs to be pointed out is that this process of transplanting a foreign concept into a different cultural and political context came with certain consequences. With reference to Japan's importation of Western liberal theory during the nineteenth century, Douglas Howland (2002, 2) argues that "westernization [in Japan] was not a linear process—unlike the tree that arrives with its roots secured in soil and burlap, there was no transplanting of the West in a neat package." The same can also be said about introducing the notion of sovereignty. As mentioned before, the traditional Chinese imaginary of connectivity before the nineteenth century was an antithesis to the Westphalian state system, as it presupposed a borderless world. What this implies is that when the notion of sovereignty was incorporated into Chinese political and intellectual discourse, it did not translate very well as the concept did not have a natural fit within the existing Chinese knowledge system. Hence, when the concept was first brought in, its arrival was bound to generate certain side effects. The following section of this chapter will therefore examine some of these side effects.

After Sovereignty: The Rise of Essentialism in Chinese Political Thinking

The first side effect resulted from the transplanting of the notion of sovereignty in Chinese political thinking was that it gave rise to a new Chinese understanding of the concept of "国 (guo)," meaning country as well as China's obsession with the idea of territorial integrity. In contemporary Chinese language, the character "国 (guo)" is used to refer to all three English concepts: country, state, and nation. Yet, just like "主权 (zhu quan)," that is, sovereignty, before the late nineteenth century, the character was not exclusively associated with the idea of a sovereign state. This means that within Qing China, for instance,

there could be a number of states with different governors in charge. Those states did not have clearly defined boundaries, nor could they make their own laws. In *Mencius: Li Lou II*, for instance, we can even notice that there is one paragraph where the character was used to describe a city:

> Accordingly, she got up early in the morning, and privately followed wherever her husband went. Throughout the whole city, there was no one who stood or talked with him. (China Text Project 2019)

However, since the introduction of the concept of sovereignty, the character "国 (guo)," it can be noticed, gradually began to be used to exclusively describe the idea of a "sovereign state," namely, a bordered state with a centralized government. For instance, in 1866, two years after the publication of Wheaton's book in Chinese, Li Hongzhang accused European powers of aggressive conducts in Chinese territory with reference to his reading of international law:

> Every country ("国 (guo)") knows its purpose is to serve people, but only to Chinese people they want to put up more restraints. They want to control people by threatening officials, and control officials by threatening the imperial court. . . . This is against the clause listed in the public law of foreign country ("国 (guo)"). This conduct is devoid of emotion and reason, and it is not fair and just [my translation]. (Li 1866; cited in Shen 1966, 9)

It can be observed that, in the above passage, Li used the word "country"—or, in the Chinese original, the character "国 (guo)"—to refer to sovereign states ("foreign country"). This is quite unusual since, as mentioned earlier, the character could also mean "home," "feud," "city," etc. After reviewing other scholarly writings on foreign countries during this period, it became clear that this exclusive usage of "国 (guo)" as a sovereign state might have resulted from China's attempt to use a concept of European origin to defend itself against the European aggression in Chinese territory. Because if China accepted the European claim on the inherent sovereign right of the state, it could use the same logic of sovereign statehood to prevent any European activities in its territory.

Two examples can be found to illustrate such a Chinese strategy to "use the foreign against the foreign": The first one is the trajectory of Guo Songtao, China's first permanent diplomatic representative in the West. In 1842, following the first Opium War, Britain and China signed the treaty of Nanjing, opening the Chinese market for foreign trade. Although the Chinese officials were not happy with the high tariffs and extraterritorial jurisdiction

listed on the treaty, it wasn't until thirty years later, in the 1870s, that the treaty was described as unequal and humiliating (Lorca 2014). This was to a great extent due to the influence cast by Guo who repeatedly protested that "the West should treat China as *equal*" and that "Westerners in China should fall under the *jurisdiction* of the Chinese local authority [my emphasis]" (Wang 2005, 24). By accepting the European conception of sovereign statehood and reapplying it to the context of Western imperialism, Guo Songtao managed to transform himself from non-European actors being subjected to European legal discourse to using international law as a means of resistance against foreign domination.

Another example was from Xue Fucheng, also a key advocate of Western learning in the late nineteenth century, who made the following remark soon after Japan made its entrance into the European-dominated international society:

> The West has a book called *Public Law for Ten Thousand Countries* (the Chinese translated title for Wheaton's *Elements of International Law*). It is used to equalize the power imbalance between nations and has a set of rules to be followed. . . . Only that Asian countries have different traditions, different political conducts, different languages; we simply do not fit with their scale of the public law. The book also never mentions the Eastern countries. In the past thirty years, Japan and Thailand have been endeavoring to conduct themselves to suit the West's public law. Ever since Japan has changed their time, they became obedient, luring the people from the West; and in return, the Western people incorporated them into the governance of the public law [my translation]. (Xue 1892, 414)

Xue's basic argument here is that the Western international law only concerns people of the West—not only because the book itself was designed *in* the West but also *for* the West (thus no mentioning of the Eastern societies). Everywhere else, especially Asia, is not—and probably should not—be part of the Western "public." Although Japan eventually managed to be incorporated into such "public," this is mainly because they had to perform in a certain way to be accepted *by* the West. However, in order for this argument to be valid, Xue first of all had to acknowledge and *essentialize* the political and cultural differences between the Western countries and those of the East; as he argued in the above passage, "*Asian countries have different traditions, different political conducts, different languages*; we simply do not fit with their scale of the public law" [my emphasis].

What is particularly interesting about Xue's account is that it demonstrates not only the changing Chinese political imaginary but also the

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changing Chinese conceptualization of the self/other binary. As mentioned earlier on, in contrast to the Westphalian state system, the Chinese connectivity of "all under heaven" allows for a much more ambiguous relation between the "self" and the "other." It presupposes the idea that one's cultural identity can be simply transformed and assimilated into the more powerful state with civilizational superiority. In his *Liberal Barbarism*, with reference to the British and French destruction of the Chinese garden in the late nineteenth century, Erik Ringmar describes such a Chinese thinking as follows:

> The Europeans were indeed barbarians, yet a barbarian, in the Chinese tradition, was not a destroyer of civilization as much as uncouth outsiders who had not yet benefited from the privileges of a Chinese-style education, and as such they were more to be pitied than feared. Barbarians were ignorant children—without knowledge of morality, philosophy, and proper ritual—and this was indeed why they had showed up at China's borders. The foreigners had, in the Chinese expression, "come to be transformed." (2013, 5)

However, if this logic is to be taken seriously, it also means that, given China's heavy defeat in the Opium War, China could be considered to have occupied the position of an inferior state and therefore should be absorbed into the Western civilization. But this obviously is not what Xue argued. Instead of willingly subduing China under the European domination, Xue used the logic of equality among states—a key assumption in the Westphalian system—and essentialized the cultural, political, and social differences between the European and the Asian countries. At this point, it can be argued, Chinese elites were already thinking of the world order from the perspective of the Westphalian system instead of their own "天下 (tian xia)."

Such an essentialist conception of cultural differences reached its zenith in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century under the influence of the second wave of Western learning. The end of the Sino-Japanese War brought about a new wave of Chinese intellectuals advocating for Western knowledge. The main difference between this time and the previous movement was that intellectuals who were advocating for the adoption of Western technology in the previous movement did not genuinely believe in the superiority of Western knowledge, while scholars pioneering the second wave were actively calling for thorough national reforms at all political, intellectual, cultural, and education levels.

One of the key proponents of the second wave of Western learning was Kang Youwei, a senior official of Guangxu Emperor and arguably China's most influential thinker of the nineteenth century. As a prominent advocate

of Western learning and constitutional reforms, Kang's writings were heavily influenced by his readings of Western classics. His most well-known theoretical contribution to the history of Chinese political thought was the concept of "大同 (da tong)," meaning the "great unity." The concept "大同 (da tong)" first appeared in the Confucian classic of *The Book of Rites*, and it was principally used to describe a society where the Confucian ethics of benevolence was practiced by all members of the society. Drawing on the original Confucian understanding of the concept as well as insights from other philosophical doctrines, between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, Kang then took a more radical approach to the understanding of the concept of "大同 (da tong)" and eventually came up with a depiction of what he called the most ideal society of "great unity." Kang basically argued that most of the world's sufferings arise from human-imposed boundaries, such as boundaries of nation, class, gender, and even family. Therefore, by eliminating those boundaries, in Kang's view, humankind can eliminate most of the unnecessary sufferings and miseries. As he wrote,

> There is a saying that "all under heaven is one nation." But whenever there are small boundaries, they all become the obstacles to tackle the big boundaries. The more we set up small boundaries, the more they cause problems to eliminate the big ones. Because the boundary of family is preventing individuals, and the boundary of a state preventing the citizens, it is very difficult for us to reach the great unity and peace. If in China, we set up the boundaries of province, government, state, county, local, village, last name, and household in order to differentiate ourselves from a different province, government, state, county, local, village, last name, and household—how can we ever reach the harmony among people? Therefore I say that the happiest order is of a great unity [my translation]. (Kang 1935, 137)

What is interesting about Kang's work is that, it shows that by the late nineteenth century, not only that Chinese intellectuals had completely accepted the European-dominated Westphalian state system as the default world order but also that they were trying to overcome such an order by (re)introducing the Chinese concept of "天下 (tian xia)"—without realizing that before the arrival of the Europeans, it had always been China's traditional conceptualization of the world order. In Kang's book, *The Great Unity*, we can see clearly how, at the beginning of the early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals had already presupposed the existence of sovereign, bounded nation-states; as he wrote in the section titled "the harm of having nation-states,"

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> Today if we want to save people from potential disasters, want to give everyone in the world happiness, want to seek the benefit of the great unity, we must first destroy the boundaries of nation-states and deconstruct the meanings of nation-states. . . . However, with that being said, nation-states are the highest form of human collectivity. Apart from the Divine above, there is no universal law above nation-states. Each nation-state acts in accordance with its own interests. This is not something that can be restrained using the public law [i.e., international law]; this is not something that can be changed using abstract ideas [my translation]. (Kang 1935, 86)

The above passage shows that, at this point, even with the introduction of international law in China, Kang already acknowledged that nation-state was the highest form of political entity at the international level and that "there is no universal law above nation-states." This is a clear indication of the complete shift of the Chinese political imaginary of connectivity from the previous borderless world of all under heaven to the modern sovereign statehood.

Following this thread, Kang then proposed a few suggestions that he believed that if we could follow them, we could enter the utopian age of "great unity": first, no bounded territories, no borders. There should be one central government for the entire world that is elected democratically. Second, no families. Coinhabitation between a man and a woman should be no longer than one year maximum. Third, free nurseries, health care, and schooling. Jobs will be assigned by the state when a child passes his or her schooling age. Fourth, all men and women should serve in the military for a few years. Free public accommodations, canteens, and properly trained police officers. And finally, encourage and reward intellectual achievements in any areas of study (Kang 1935).

Upon its publication, Kang's propositions were greatly embraced. His argument regarding the human-imposed boundaries being the source of sufferings was especially echoed by then Chinese intellectuals. However, what is rarely mentioned in the debates regarding Kang Youwei's work is that his notion of "great unity" illustrated not only the internationalization of the Westphalian modern statehood in the Chinese thinking but also the internalization of the racial and biological essentialism that were prevailing in the Western intellectual discourse in the late nineteenth century. As mentioned earlier, Chinese intellectuals began to engage with Western knowledge as part of the "Western learning" movement in the 1860s. During that period, scholars such as Kang Youwei began to engage with Western scientific theory. The ideas of Darwin, Lamark, and Spencer, for example, are said to have

begun to circulate among Chinese intellectuals as early as 1870 (Tsu 2005). In other words, they were introduced into the Chinese discourse around the same time as the concept of sovereignty.

According to Historian Emma Teng (2013), of all the ideas Chinese intellectuals were exposed to, none was more powerful than those of social Darwinism that assert the superiority of the white race over the yellow due to the superior progress of Western civilization. Facing the mounting pressure of European imperialism, Teng (2013) argues that Chinese scholars of the late nineteenth century became obsessed with the theories concerning the idea of an international struggle for the survival of the fittest. Hence, essentialist theories such as social Darwinism that portrays a global conflict between the white and yellow resonated strongly with them both on intellectual and emotional levels at that time.

If we read Kang's *The Book of Great Unity* carefully, we can also discover that Kang's understanding of the world was deeply influenced by, if not rooted in, the ideology of social Darwinism and Western racial theory. As mentioned before, the basic premise of Kang's *The Book of Great Unity* is to eliminate human-imposed boundaries. With a view of racism as a global issue, Kang accordingly dedicated the fourth chapter of his book to discuss "Eliminating Racial Boundaries and Amalgamating the Races." Kang (1935) first categorized the world into four races—white, yellow, black, and brown—and argued that it was the physical differences among these groups that gave rise to the problem of racial inequality. As he wrote,

> In a peaceful world of great unity, everyone is equal and everyone exists in great unity—this is of course a fair thing to say. However, things do differ and that is an inevitable truth. If we were to have everything as equal, then those things much be equal in its intelligence, level of knowledge, shape, and physique. Only then we can have true equality. . . . Lincoln freed the black slaves, but look now what is happening in America: (white) Americans are reluctant to brush their teeth with the blacks; they do not allow to dine or even sit with the blacks; blacks are not allowed to use the first class of their cars, or enter a restaurant. If a black is elected to be an official, white Americans bully him; if a black is intellectual, they mock him that. (Kang 1935, 138–39, my translation)

Kang hence proposed that the way to solve such a problem is simply to "unify" all human races—or, in his own words, "racial improvement" (Kang 1935, 142). He explicitly denigrated the black and brown as inferior races and proposed a detailed plan for them to "improve" on their "racial quality" through interracial marriages:

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> If the blacks and browns were to move elsewhere to settle, then they should live with the yellow and the white. Then we will set up a rewarding system for men who are willing to marry the brown and the black ladies as well as for women who are willing to marry the black and brown men. The reward will be called the "racial improvement award." Some might ask: if we keep mixing the superior races with the inferior ones, would that not lead to the deterioration of the human race in general? I say: no, not necessarily. In a hundred thousand years' time, there will be much less blacks and browns. The world will be full of white and yellow, and only a few blacks and browns. This is the way to improve to racial quality [my translation].

At this point, it is probably not too difficult to speculate that in Kang's ideal society of "great unity," there are probably two races living, namely, the yellow and the white.

In his study of the expansion of the international society in East Asia during the nineteenth century, Shogo Suzuki (2009, 14) argues that Japan's invasion of China soon after becoming a member of the international society indicates that Japan did not only accept the Western standards regarding what means to be a "civilized" state but also accepted the idea about how they should *act* as a "civilized" state. That is to say, during their socialization process in the international society, Japan emulated the "civilizing" mode of action conducted by the Europeans by invading China. A similar argument can also be applied to the case of Kang Youwei and possibly other Chinese intellectuals of the nineteenth century who shared his views: The rise of such a racial essentialism in Chinese intellectual discourse after the shift of the Chinese political imaginary shows that China did not only accept and internalize the European notion of modern statehood but also emulated *what they thought a modern state should be doing* by essentializing the racial and cultural differences. Ringmar describes the sentiment of the Chinese intellectuals in the late nineteenth century as follows:

> Before 1860, the Chinese could just be themselves, but after 1860 they were forced to become either pro- or anti-European, pro- or anti-modern, and pro- or anti-railroads, electricity, democracy, Darwinism, Spencerism, Freud, canned vegetables, the Charleston, and cigarettes. (2013, 11)

By imitating the theories of social Darwinism and committing themselves to the ideology of Western racial discourse, the Chinese intellectuals were trying to prove that China was now a modern, pro-European state. Scholars such as Emma Teng (2013) accordingly argue that modern Chinese racial theory was formulated within such a context of intellectual transformation

in late Qing China, drawing on both the nation's long history of thought on ethnic difference as well as new ideas derived from the West. The transplanting of the concept of modern statehood, it can be argued, to a great extent facilitated and legitimized this intellectual invention. In this regard, Kang's work is both a demonstration and a reminder of the consequences of the conceptual transplanting of the idea of sovereignty and modern statehood in Chinese political imaginary in the nineteenth century.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the modern conception of sovereignty became transplanted in the Chinese political imaginary in the nineteenth century. It has demonstrated how, in a span of less than half a century, the Chinese imaginary of connectivity has shifted from the traditional Chinese idea of "天下 (tian xia)" that presupposes a borderless world to the modern Westphalian system that is based on the mutual recognition of state sovereignty. However, it has been argued that such an act of transplanting a foreign concept that did not naturally fit within the existing Chinese knowledge system was not a linear process and therefore it had also generated certain consequences in the process of this conceptual transplanting: By the late nineteenth century, the Chinese intellectuals had not only accepted the Westphalian state system as the default world order but also tried to (re)introduce the Chinese "all under heaven" as a way to overcome the shortcomings of the state system. Yet, such a complete acceptance of the modern world order also led to the rise of racial essentialism in Chinese intellectual discourse. This was mostly due to the Chinese intellectuals trying to prove that China was now a modern, pro-European state by imitating the essentialist depiction of racial differences. The present chapter is a very preliminary study on the subject matter and more research is definitely in need to further substantiate what has been argued. What is called for here, however, is that there is always a dualistic nature to the translation of a European political concept into the intellectual discourse of the non-European countries and more attention should be paid to this area of study and its link to the study of IR.

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