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Abstract

The institutional platforms that supported activist intellectuals seeking to inaugurate political and cultural modernity through the formation of study societies (*xuehui*) proliferated throughout the late Qing China (ca. 1895-1911). While existing studies either subsume this distinctive phenomenon under the political programs of reform and revolutionary movements or conceive it as a kind of the prototypical formation of civil society and the public sphere in late Qing China, they seldom question the meanings and functions of ‘civilization,’ “society” and “civility” as the constitutive and highly contested notions underlying the cultural and political practices of these study societies. This paper argues that the symbolic and practical aspects of this phenomenon can be better understood as a sociological process of state formation. By generalizing Norbert Elias’ analysis of the relationship between power figuration and affective self-constraint in Europe’s transition from an absolutist “court society” to an imperialist “world society,” this paper explains why and how these study societies arose as a civilizing movement within the context of Chinese social and cultural politics of the late nineteenth century.

Civilization and Competition: Study Societies and State Formation in Late Qing China

Hon-Fai Chen

The Problem: ‘Civilization’ and ‘Society’ as Language Events

This article offers a sociological analysis of the cultural and political dynamics of study societies (*xuehui*) proliferating throughout late Qing China (ca. 1895-1911). Mostly founded by the reformist and later revolutionary elements of the intellectual elites or “literati,” the study societies were designed to unite and empower the elites themselves and by extension the common people. Therefore, the societies laid the societal foundation for modernizing the Chinese nation-state against the Western imperialist states and Meiji Japan. While the study societies sought primarily to promote Western learning through public lectures, and publication of books and newspapers, they served as an important institutional platform for activist intellectuals to inculcate the elites and the people with “civility,” the general qualities requisite of a citizen which were believed to constitute the civilized nations of the West. In this framework, the weakening imperial state and the decadent

traditional society of China seemed to be precariously caught between barbarism and civilization. Many study societies sought to enable the nascent Chinese nation to attain civilization and become a strong state.

“Civilization” (*wenmin*) and “society” (*qun, shehui*) thus constituted the leitmotifs of the study society movement in the late Qing. They were part of the broader project of rejuvenating “Confucian religion” as the spiritual and institutional force of Imperial China in the reform era, but they were coupled with the cultivation of military citizenship among the Chinese people in the revolutionary period. The changing meanings and functions of “civilization” and “society” directly shaped the trajectory of cultural and political modernization in early twentieth-century China. The very appearance and prevalence of these neologisms constitutes what the French historians and sociologists call “language events,” which reflect and mediate long-term institutional transformations (Boudon 2007: 36). The major purpose of this paper is to clarify the sociological and cultural significance of these study societies and their orientations towards “civilization” and “civility”.

The study society movement has been meticulously documented by historians and examined in relation to the concept of civil society and citizenship (Zhang 1971, 1975; Wang 1971; Fogel and Zarrow 1997). Drawing upon the theoretical insights offered by Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong, this historical approach highlights the overarching objective of late Qing study societies to strengthen the solidarity or “society” among the elites and to cultivate the Chinese people into virtuous modern

citizens (Price 1997). Closely related to this approach is the debate over civil society and public sphere in China. The scholars identify the existence of a burgeoning sphere of gentry-based associations and presses as symptomatic of the prototypical formation of civil society and public sphere in late Qing China. As the study societies belonged to the “third realm” between the state and the families, private interests were transcended by the activist gentry elites to rebuild the moral and public authority in local and national affairs (Huang 1993; Rowe 1993; Wakeman 1993).

This civil society argument echoes the paradigm of “local elite dominance” in the Chinese historiography. Such a paradigm challenges the longstanding emphasis on the modernization theory and its critique of the subordination of gentry under the imperial bureaucracy and kinship system (Esherick and Rankin 1990). According to Mary Rankin, the peculiar sociopolitical context of late imperial China generated a relatively autonomous space between state and society, in which the local gentry together with the rising commercial elites actively engaged in managing public affairs and formulating public opinion. Inspired by the revival of the Confucian statecraft tradition, the study society reflected a rising trend of the local elites to position themselves as advocates and exemplars of modern citizenship (Rankin 1986; Brook and Frolic 1997). Underlying these interpretations is the common analytical emphasis on the associational structure of these study societies and its impact on facilitating civic culture against the bureaucratic ethos and amoral familism of the official and private spheres. The theoretical basis

of these historical studies resides in the associationalist paradigm in sociology, for which civil society comprises voluntary associations conducive to the forging of non-coercive, horizontal ties among their members, thereby cultivating the culture of civic engagement and laying the institutional foundation for democratic governance (Putnam 1993, 2000; Edwards 2001). This associationalist paradigm is embraced by historians reveal their unanimous preference for “study association” over “study society.”

Granted the importance of institutional structure and social capital, the associationalist paradigm in historical and sociological analysis nevertheless abstracts the specific meanings of “civility” and “society” from the concrete *practices* of study societies, which were in turn situated within broader sociopolitical and *world-historical* contexts. Specifically, there has been no adequate treatment of the paramount themes of “civilization”, “Confucian religion” and “military citizenship” in the study society movement, all of which were emergent responses of the late Qing intellectuals to the formation of modern Chinese nation-state under the constraints of traditional ideologies and imperialist powers. By adhering to a singular, undifferentiated conception of gentry elites and a trans-historical model of civil organizations, the question of what constituted the practical and constructed meanings of “civility” in the first place remains unanswered. Instead of probing into the linguistic and institutional transformations associated with the study societies, the latter were subsumed along with other types of elite-based associations such as chambers of commerce under the rubric of the local gentry’s

dominance and Confucian revival. While it is not wrong to see the study societies as indicative of the institutionalization of civil society and citizenship in China, they must be placed in a cultural and comparative-historical perspective in order to examine the importance of the study society movement.

How should we conceptualize and explain the developmental patterns and characteristics of the late Qing study societies? The existing literature on state formation and civilization has largely focused on those cases in which the cultures of civility were emanated or promoted by the state. In this vein the relationship between state formation and civilization is articulated on the basis of empirical generalizations from the paradigmatic case of Western Europe. Central to this theoretical model is the driving force of war-making and the monopolization of violence (and taxation) by the modern state, which in turn unleashes the cultural and political processes of civilization.

Such a theoretical model could be found in Norbert Elias' (1983, 1994[1939]) theory of civilizing process. The incessant wars in feudal Europe, according to Elias, had eventually led to the concentration of military and political powers in the hands of absolutist rulers. In the process the aristocratic classes were transformed from warriors to courtiers, whose accesses to power depended no longer upon military and feudal services, but rather the direct conferrals of favor and status by the kings under the setting of the royal courts. As the resort to expressed force and violence were precluded by the domination of

single powerful rulers, careful observance and meticulous refinement of court etiquettes became the ways by which the aristocratic elites and the absolutist kings displayed, maintained and acquired their status honor and power. The performance of etiquettes and rituals thus became the sole legitimate means of power and status competition, in which those courtiers who could not control aggressive emotions or affect before their enemies would have a precarious chance of survival and success in the subaltern struggles of the absolutist courts. Accordingly a culture of 'civility' and 'society' originated from the peculiar power setting (or 'figuration' in Elias' rendering) of the courts, in which the capacities to exercise self-restraint, to refrain from violence, and to represent oneself appropriately before antagonistic others were identified and valued as noble virtues *par excellence*.

Hence what contributed to the rise of the culture of 'civility' was the dynamics of competition, defined here as power struggles without resorting to open and violent conflict (Simmel 1955). With the elimination of feudal wars, the initial stage of free and relatively equal competition had given way to the centralization of military and political power by the absolutist kings. With the internal pacification of the jurisdictions and territories owned by the absolutist rulers, however, the maintenance of their power monopolies were increasingly dependent upon the contribution of taxes and the fulfillment of specialized administrative functions by the nobilities, the bourgeoisies, and eventually the citizens. The personal, 'private' monopoly of the absolutist ruler vis-à-vis courtiers was gradually transformed into the

impersonal and 'public' rule of the modern state bureaucracy vis-à-vis social classes.

According to Max Weber, a modern state is a monopolizer of legitimate violence and taxation within a given territory. It not only possesses the administrative structure of bureaucratization and political centralization but also dictates the symbolic and practical templates of "civility," "society" and "civilization." The state's monopolization of power renders possible internal pacification and the modernization processes of commercialization and urbanization. In these developmental processes, the ever lengthened chains of social and functional interdependence generate the pressure for the embedded individuals to exercise tighter self-constraints and disciplines. In this way the aristocratic culture of civility" was progressively spread to the *nobles de robe*, bourgeoisies and finally the general public.

This process culminated in the extension of the meaning of civility to that of civilization, a transformation in pace with the intensified warfare among the internally pacified states. In the eighteenth century the notion of civilization served for the aristocratic and the intellectual elites like Montesquieu and Voltaire to evaluate all societies along an evolutionary scale of civilized versus barbaric peoples and states. With the relative pacification of Western Europe in the late nineteenth century, the notion was explicitly invoked by various nation-states to legitimize their imperialist invasions against the backward and stagnant peoples in the non-Western world. In this light, the "world society" among nations

could be taken as a “court society: writ large, in which the nations found it imperative to remain “courteous” by constraining their open rivalries and conflicts.

From Christian Civilization to Confucian Religion

The rise of study societies directly responded to the decline of the Qing state as a monopolizer of political and ideological powers. With the strengthening of its early absolutist rule, the Qing state (ca. 1644-1911) monopolized the allocation of spiritual (learning and cultivation) and material (degree and office) goods on an unprecedented scale. This led to the corruption of Chinese bureaucrats and literati to an extent no less severe and rampant than the priests in the medieval Catholic Church. The state’s monopolistic control was gravely challenged by the encompassing crises of silver outflow, peasant unrests, and most fatally, the Western imperialist intrusions.

Following the military defeat of the Qing in the Sino-Japanese War, seventy-two study societies emerged between 1895 and 1898, a period known as the Wuxu Reform (Min 1995). The study societies continued to grow after a brief moment of prohibition by the state. By 1909, 723 study societies had been founded across China (Sang 1995: 274). Unlike the Foreign Affairs Movement in the mid-nineteenth century, the reformist intellectuals of the study society movement perceived the tremendous strength of the West as residing not so much in its military and

economic progress than in the spiritual and institutional force of Christianity. This spiritual force was thought to bring the kings, the ruling elites and the people together to form a strong and civilized “society” in the West. To counter the West, the leaders of the study societies were determined to rebuild the spiritual and institutional foundation of Confucianism based on the common and analogous characteristics of Christianity. In order to create a society and a civilization, the strategy of the reformist literati was to revitalize the “modern,” the universalistic and *associational* elements in Confucianism by appropriating certain Christian beliefs and practices. In this vein, the study societies set forth the radical proposal to inaugurate the ‘Confucian religion’ (*kongjiao*) as a comparable spiritual and institutional power vis-à-vis Christianity.

At the practical level, the study societies drew on many Christian artifacts as the symbolic and political means to rejuvenate the Confucian tradition and the imperial state order. They involved the controversial practice of “Confucian Chronicle” (*Kongzi jinian*) in the study society journals to rival the “Jesus Chronicle” (*Yesu jinian*). The controversy had to do with the issue of whether the Confucian Chronicle subverted the Chinese imperial practice of Emperor Chronicle, a symbol of the Emperor’s absolutist power (Tang 1993). For the same reason, the designation of Sunday as the resting and meeting day of the study societies was no less embattled among the scholar officials (Wang 2002: 446-7).

The appropriation of Christian practices and institutions, however, should not be taken as a mere formalistic gesture on the part of the literati. For them the various ritual practices of study societies constituted the modern Christian and Confucian civilizations. The core notions of equality and association were espoused by a plethora of study societies devoted to the eradication of foot-binding practice among women. There was also an equalization of rituals and etiquettes among study society members with different status and official titles (Wang 1971: 291). Other reformed ritual practices included “Confucius worship” and “Yellow Emperor Chronicle” as the symbolic means of uniting the people, asceticism and daily discipline as the means of extending human life and strengthening the Chinese people, and the cultivation of children’s learning and the liberation of women as the path towards saving the national body of China.

The overarching purpose of reforming these ritual practices was to recover ‘*affect*’ or ‘love-power’ (*aili*) as the implicit moral and metaphysical principle in Confucianism and Christianity and to reconstitute the ‘*solidarity*’ or ‘society’ (*qun*) among Chinese. While ‘*affect*’ or ‘love’ was conceived as the basis of the material and spiritual power of Christian civilization, it was held to be universally present in the physical world as electronic attraction and in the social world as interpersonal association. In any case, ‘*affect*’ or ‘love’ was held to be essentially the same as the metaphysical entity of ‘humanity’ or *ren* in Confucianism. As Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao pointed out:

Benevolence is *ren*, electricity, and ether, all of which residing in

every human individual... From this arises the *ren* of the human order, the civilization of the human order, the evolution of the human order, and the order of 'Great Prosperity' (*taiping*) and 'Grand Harmony' (*datong*). (Kang 1903, quoted in Li 2003[1979]: 95)

The origin of the world, the life of every creature, the continuation of family and state, the institution of rituals and propriety: none of them originates not from the entity of *ren*. If there were no 'affect' (*aili*), the world would immediately fall apart. (Liang 1901, quoted in Li 2003[1979]: 96)

The convergence between Christianity and Confucianism can be discerned in the closely related category of society or *qun*, a word directly adopted from the early Confucian Xunzi (340-245 B.C.). As the principle of *qun* originates from the mutual attraction between earth and heaven and culminates in the human way of forming association, Liang held that the strength of the West lay precisely in its rich fabric of associational life as shown in the association of citizens in (*sic*) parliaments, of bourgeoisie in corporations, and of intellectuals in study societies. But Liang was quick to deny that the associational tradition originated in the West; rather it had long been practiced among the literati in Imperial China until the absolutist rule of the Qing (Liang 2000[1896]: 374). Despite the doubts over the 'Christianization' of Confucianism by some study societies, the universalistic and associational orientation was widely identified as the constitutive principles of Confucianism *per se*. The associational structure of study

society and its analogous characteristics with modern civil society should thus be understood in light of its broader intents to compete with Christianity and thereby the West.

Confucian Religion and Missions in Hunan Province

While Kang Youwei first proposed the idea of Confucian religion and implemented it in the Strengthening Study Societies in Beijing and Shanghai, this idea was of great cultural significance when it was spread to Hunan province. As the most 'robust' and 'spirited' region during the reform era, Hunan had witnessed the founding of thirty-three study societies from 1895 to 1898, making up almost half of the total number in China and outshining the 17 societies in Shanghai and the 14 in Beijing. Among the study societies in Hunan, the Southern Study Society (*nán xúyǐhuì*) had been the most influential, before which only seven societies were founded (Ding 2000: 328-9, 345 n.39). In adopting the Confucian religion as their guiding principle, the Southern Study Society and its related associations had considerably elaborated the meanings and functions of 'civilization' and 'society'.

In the first place, 'Confucian religion' and 'civilization' implicated *the control of popular violence*, a problem rampant in Hunan. The cases of violent attacks on foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians (*jiao'an*) were denounced by the study societies as irrational, irresponsible, and barbaric, threatening the state's survival and inducing the imperialist

retaliations. While the populace was largely to blame, the anti-Christian violence was often led by the local elites and junior degree-holders in the name of defending Confucian ethics and cosmological order against Christianity. In this vein 'Confucian religion' was contrasted with the Confucian fundamentalism of conservative elites. In its principled adherence to the distinction between civilization and barbarism, genuine Confucianism prescribes that a civilized state like China should never treat the alien races with force and terror. Violence was thus denounced not only in its threats to the fate of state survival but also in its deprivation of state honor in the international realm. The barbaric anti-foreign and anti-Christian attacks had earned China the contemptuous name of 'semi-civilized state' (*banyou jiaohua zhiguo*) among the Western nations. While competition with the Christian West was important, it must be distinguished from outright conflicts and violence. Apart from the ethical commands of Confucian religion itself, China was forced to adopt the 'universal principles' (*gongli*) of civilization because the imperialist states upheld the differentiation between 'civilized' nations and the barbaric and semi-civilized one, treating the former with equality and respects while intruding the latter in terms of religion and government:

The European nations presume the importance of universal principles, for which the barbaric states should be treated differently from their civilized counterparts. It would not be brutal to kill their peoples, and not unjust to occupy their territories. Whenever the peoples in the West plan to ruin a state and seize its territories, they will circulate pamphlets and newspapers in which the state is

derided as utterly uncivilized, such that they should impose religion on it; and its people as severely deprived, such that they should govern them (*Xiang Bao* 1898: June 6).

Hence implicit in the notions of 'civilization' and 'Confucian religion' is the pressure generated by the unequal competition with imperialism, which imposed upon China the 'universal principles' or the generalized needs of denouncing the use of violence in favor of a tighter control of aggressive emotions and self-restraints of affect on the part of its elites and people.

Equally important was the idea of 'mission', which was proposed as a practical substitute for popular violence against Christianity. 'If we are so hateful of the Christian missions in China, why don't we preach Confucian religion on our own?' (*Xiang Bao* 1898: March 29a). If the strength of Christianity and thereby the West rested upon the missionary efforts of the churches, then the weakness of Confucian religion and China had to do with the underdevelopment of study societies as the cultural and functional equivalents to their ecclesiastical counterparts. The lecturing activities of study societies were not merely taken at their cognitive values: rather they constituted quasi-religious rituals for proponents and opponents. The public lectures were criticized for their resemblance with Christian preaching in which the preacher proselytized among his listeners and they sit side by side with no differentiation of their official titles and social status, a practice deviating from the Confucian hierarchical system. In reply to this critique, the

quasi-Christian form of study society activities was justified for its intent to promote and defend Confucian religion (*Xiang Bao* 1898: March 12). The religious analogy between the 'mission' of study societies and Christian churches was taken even more seriously when they defended Shandong against the German occupation in an attempt to rescue Confucius' tomb as the 'Jerusalem' of China (*Xiang Bao* 1898: April 18b).

However, the preservation of Confucian religion in missions was conceived in terms of its relevance to the inter-state competition in strength and in honor. If the study societies were as successful as the Christian churches in spreading their messages all over the world, China should be able to shed away the disdainful labels of barbarism and semi-civilization (*Xiang Bao Lei Zuan* 1968[1898]: 438-44). This aspect refers to the second meaning of civilization as *the competition for prestige and honor* under the international system configured by the imperialist West.

For the study society intellectuals in Hunan, the great dishonor of the Qing state in the international system, which differentiated and ranked the states in terms of their levels of civilization and the peoples in their levels of civility, had to do with the demoralizing effects of its civil service examination system. The civil service examination had distracted the scholars and the officials from the genuine concerns with Confucian religion. But the universal principles of civilization and civility originated from Confucian religion, which had been nevertheless repudiated after the sage kings of antique China and adopted and

partially practiced by Christianity. With the conflict and competition of contemporary China with the Western nation-states, however, 'civilization' would eventually return to its origin in Confucian religion and fully realize its principles and values. The civilized, not merely military and technological, competition of China was significant for resisting the imperialist invasions and regaining its honor as the most civilized state in the world.

The third meaning of civilization referred to *the constitution of societal community* and national identity. In this regard study society was to integrate the four traditional classes into a single nation comprising of 'four billion individuals' (*siwanwan zhizhong*). As the civil society literature has rightly pointed out, here study societies retained and indeed promoted the dominance of local gentry elites over the common people, such that the democratization of power (*pingquan*) was largely confined to the relationships between the political and intellectual elites at the exclusion of the 'ignorant folks'.

But study society should not be understood as a mere instance of the institutionalization of the local gentry's dominance, as there was a 'civilizational' dimension underlying its very conception of a national community. The initiatives of study societies to defend the Confucian religion against Christianity constituted the basis for all Chinese people to identify with their common religion and national lineage. In a similar fashion to Christianity, Confucian religion prescribes the 'natural' equality and solidarity of the people as owners of one and the same

national-state, which is never the private property of any single individual (*Xiang Bao* 1898: March 11). 'Society,' 'state' and 'public-private' thus belong to the universal principles of civilization, which differentiate human beings from animals precisely in the readiness of the former to associate freely and equally. While study society could be taken as a civil society in making, such an interpretation should be placed in a broader 'civilizational' perspective.

But the constitution of national community was never independent from power. In reality, the study societies and their programme of Confucian religion and civilization had to confront and reconcile with the power and domination of the imperial state. While the study societies arose with the breakdown of state monopoly and amidst imperialist attacks, they were always caught between illegitimacy and legitimacy as imperial state policies oscillated between repression and approval (*Xiang Bao* 1898: April 15). Conversely the study societies purported to institutionalize themselves as the societal basis for the emerging Chinese nation-state, by performing the various de facto functions of governance, official training, commerce, policing welfare and even liturgy (*Xiang Bao* 1898: April 16a; April 16b; April 18a).

In adhering to the universal principles of equality, freedom and civilization, the study societies stood in tension with the imperial state. In some radical accounts, the state was identified as the source of authoritarianism and barbarism that were responsible for the eclipse of egalitarian and public spirits in Confucian religion, a point later taken

up as the leitmotif of the study society movement in the revolutionary era (*Xiang Bao* 1898: April 16c). The uneasy position of study society vis-à-vis the domination of the imperial state on the one hand, and the legitimating principles of egalitarianism and civilization on the other, was manifested in the lack of consensus among its members concerning the proper boundaries between state and society (*Xiang Bao Lei Zuan* 1968[1898]: 407-16).

This brings us to the four and final aspects of civilization as the reconstruction of cultural tradition. We have discussed the constructed relationship between Confucian religion and the universal principles of civilization, which legitimated the adoption of equality, society and affect as the founding themes and practices of the study society movement. The convergence of Christianity and Confucianism in these principles, however, had been called in question in view of the incessant military contests among nations, which defied normative regulations *per se* (*Xiang Bao Lei Zuan* 1968[1898]: 445-8). Apart from its tension with imperialist competition, at times the efforts at cultural legitimation also clashed with those of imperial domination and national identification. For the reconciliation of Chinese and Western civilizations and thereby the enhancement of the competitive strengths of the Chinese state, adoption of Western clothing and inter-marriage with Westerners were proposed (*Xiang Bao* 1898: March 29b). This radical proposal was one of the easy targets of critiques and attacks by the conservative elites.

The study societies in Hunan were met with strong opposition from

the conservative intellectuals who sought popular and elite support in their counter-attacks. The conservative alliance was especially strong as the former soldiers of the Hunan Army were dispatched to their native place either as sub-degree elites or as marginalized bandits. As a civilian army substituting for the corruptive and impotent eight-banner military elites of the Qing, the Hunan Army had effectively mobilized the local militia in the name of defending Confucianism against the Taiping rebels. This peculiar mode of militarization arose in response to the de-monopolization of military power by the Qing government and enhanced the remarkable traditionalism of the Hunan people in the second half of the nineteenth century (Kuhn 1980).

Such a socio-historical configuration contributed to the rapid demise of the study society movement in Hunan, despite its early signs of robustness. While at its early stage the reform initiatives of the study societies in Hunan received tremendous support from some renowned intellectuals like Wang Xianqian, the adherence to the 'universal' principles of equality, freedom and civilization eventually resulted in rejection in the name of 'defending the orthodoxy' (*yijiao*). The practices of adopting the 'Jesus Chronicle' were associated with treacherous acts like 'perming blonde hairs', 'following the Cross', and 'treating family members as animals.' In this way, the multilayered meanings of 'civilization' were being 'deflated' or undervalued, as the normative principles and symbolic functions it connoted were all reduced, under the influence of Confucian fundamentalism, into the shameful conversion to Christianity and subservience to the West. Like the

religious cases it purported to control, the attacks on the study society movement in Hunan were launched under the alliance of the elites and the masses. Well before the failure of the *coup de'tat* in 1898, some study society members were expelled by the elites and the populace out of the Hunan province (Esherwick 1976; Platt 2007).

Military Citizenship and Sports in Shanghai

After the brief repression and prohibition by the Qing state at the turn of the twentieth century the center of gravity of the study society movement had moved to Shanghai and more broadly the economically advanced region of Jiangnan, although the number of study societies in other places (including Hunan) continued to grow. Among the 276 study societies that had been established from 1901 to 1904, 77 were located in Jiangsu, 51 in Zhejiang, and 170 in Shanghai, altogether making up over sixty percents of the total (Sang 1995: 275). At the cultural level, the sea change was shown in a sudden shift of emphasis among the study societies from Confucian religion to the development of the military, citizenship, and sports. The study society movement in Shanghai was further distinguished from its Hunan predecessor in its relative emphasis on the pressure of international competition and hence the urgency of uniting the Chinese people into a national community. Accordingly the discourses and practices of study societies shifted away from their previous stress on the need to accommodate traditional practices and submit to political domination, though these aspects

remained important.

While the notion of 'civilization' continued to connote the universal principles of equality and freedom, it was stamped with a heightened sense of urgency due to international competition, which was explicitly likened to a 'swallowing' monster. Those civilized nations adhering to the principles of autonomy and self-government could swallow the territories of others at will, whereas those barbaric nations were subjected to swallowing (*Jingzhong Ribao* 1904: June 14-18). Competition was not only identified as the defining characteristics of the twentieth century, but also elevated as a universal principle governing the evolution and the natural selection of nations. In any case, the essence of competition was to preserve one's own rights and autonomy against the intrusion of others, which necessitates the unification of the people into a great solidarity group or 'society' (*Su Bao* 1903: April 22). The success of transforming China into a new nation thus depended upon the 'materials upon which the nation is to be built', that is, the 'quality' or 'civility' of the Chinese people (*Su Bao* 1903: June 2).

In this vein the study society movement in Shanghai shared with its Hunan predecessor the emphasis on the distinction between competition and open conflict and the denunciation of irrational and uncontrolled violence. The critique was targeted at the Boxer Rebellion, which had incurred heavy indemnities and disgrace among the Chinese. The blind efforts of 'aiding the Qing' and 'eliminating the foreigners' (*fuqing mieyang*) were far from genuine nationalism (read: *not* Confucian

religion), which necessitates the competence on the part of the citizens to articulate and follow the proper ways of preserving national territory and expulsing foreigners. The Boxer Rebellion was nothing but an outbreak of intense hatred against the encroachment of foreign embassies and churches into their daily lives. Their impulsiveness, stupidity and stubbornness were comparable to inferior horses and dogs, who merely respond to immediate stimuli but never constitute a solidarity group or society that could compete with their enemies in a conscious and disciplined way (*Su Bao* 1903: May 8-9). The study society was thus responsible for cultivating among the Chinese the generalized capacity to control affect and to refrain from violence that would only accentuate imperialist attacks and national crisis. Hence what distinguishes civilization from barbarism, or 'society' from 'animal,' was not just the repression of aggressive impulses; it also entailed the affective commitment of individuals to the *fate* and *honor* of the Chinese nation (*Su Bao* 1903: April 8).

The outrageous behaviors of the Boxers and the distorted characteristics of the Chinese were in turn attributed to the 'slavery education' (*nuli jiaoyu*) under the authoritarian rule of the alien Manchu regime, which had cultivated a pathos of individualism among the Chinese (*Su Bao* 1903: May 8-9). The notion of 'slavery education' originated from the widespread resistance of the students to both government-run and church-run academies, both of which relying heavily upon the financial supports and coordination efforts of the gentry merchants. But while the gentry merchants delighted in

championing themselves as the supporters and guardians of 'civilization,' more often than not they undertook these tasks solely out of the possible gains to be derived from in serving the imperialist powers, and/or their submissiveness to the New Policy initiatives of the authoritarian government. Conflicts thus arose within the academies between the conservative, 'barbaric' gentry merchants and the radical, 'civilized' students, which gave rise to the formation of most study societies in Shanghai, including the most influential ones, the Educational Society of China (*Zhongguo jiaoyuhui*) and the Patriotic Study Society (*Aiguo xueshe*). In the process, however, the students themselves further contributed to the 'inflation' of the meaning of 'civilization' by elevating even the pettiest conflicts into the uncompromising battles between civilization and barbarism.

The general dissatisfaction with the Qing state and the gentry merchants grew along with the renunciation of the Christian Church as the agent and model of civilization. Apart from the distrust of religion as a superstitious force motivating the Boxers, and of Confucianism as the ideological foundation of the Manchu state, the attitude change towards the churches was directed against their alliance with the authoritarian state and the gentry merchants. While the imperialist powers were regarded as a civilizing force in their protection of activist intellectuals and students from state prosecutions by resorting to the extraterritorial rights, their general interest in maintaining the status quo coincided with those of the gentry merchants (and not infrequently those apparently radical students who were actually status-seeking and hence

likewise 'barbaric'). Under the commercialized setting of the concessions, the coalition set the limits of radical action, imputing the 1911 revolution in Shanghai with a reactionary, non-violent character more reminiscent of an elite-based *coup de'tat* than a far-reaching social revolution.

But then what constituted the alternative to 'Confucian religion' as the principle and practice of 'civilization' in the study society movement in Shanghai? Here the 'secular' alternative of *military citizenship* (*junguomin zhuyi*) was proposed and widely adopted. While the notion was undoubtedly a response to the growing salience of international war at the turn of the twentieth century, it shared the same emphasis with Confucian religion in its denunciation of unprincipled violence and the cultivation of affective identification with the nascent Chinese nation. More importantly, militarism was elevated and generalized into a theoretical and practical model of civilization that was indispensable for the cultivation of state strength under international competition.

Central to the notion of military citizenship was a normative model of the army, which was conceived as at once the most barbaric and the most civilized. It was the most barbaric because all nations were forced to maintain their armies in order to survive military contests. The defeated nations would be robbed of freedom and equality once and for all, and suffer destruction and enforced compensations. It was power and killing rather than the universal principles of civilization that governed the age of "survival of the fittest". On the other hand, the army was the most civilized because the military, devoted itself to the

cultivation of a military spirit, army and fraternal solidarity among their soldiers as well as their peoples. In particular, army etiquettes and *rituals* (*junli*) signified the norms of mutuality and respect, not only between superiors and inferiors but also between enemies, honoring the nationalistic sentiments and devotions of their soldiers and peoples (*Su Bao* 1903: March 3).

The army was glorified as the 'Mother of Civilization.' As the foundation of national defense and expansion, military forces were critical for the spread of commerce, religion, colonialism, and indeed all artifacts of civilization and progress. The level of civilization was thus directly correlated with the degree of military strength. Those nations without sufficient military strength to secure their own survival were at the same time deprived of the intellectual and technological progress of civilization. A great nation with the highest attainment of civilization was possible only with the bloods, tears and nationalist devotion of her army. Competition thus entails the strategic use of the strongest possible means for securing national survival and accomplishing civilization. Only if a nation adhered to civilization as her 'mind' or principle but barbarism as her 'body' or strategy could her people survive the military contests and enjoy the fruits of civilization (*Su Bao* 1903: March 3).

The notion of military citizenship stood in tension with Confucianism, in particular its emphasis on filial piety. A story was told about a Japanese soldier refusing to retreat from the war with the Russians even though his father was seriously ill. The narrow-minded,

vulgar disciples of Confucius would readily blame the Japanese soldier as un-filial because Confucianism put the affective relationship between father and son as deeply rooted in the natural disposition of human beings. But the father-son relationship was one of the “private gratitudes” (*sien*) rather than the basis of “public justice” (*gongyi*). The affective commitment of individuals to their respective families should never hinder their shared identification with society and nation-state. While recognizing the Confucian principle of filial piety, military citizenship emphasized the allocation and generalization of affect from the private to the public realm (*Jingzhong Ribao* 1904: June 2).

At the practical level, military citizenship was distinguished from the strategic deployment of armed force and the mobilization of the masses. Military citizenship singled out *sports* as a peaceful and disciplined way of cultivating civility among ordinary Chinese (Brownell 1995, Morris 2004). Among the 276 study societies that had been established from 1901 to 1904, seventeen were sports clubs. But sports activities were also widely practiced among educational societies (21 in number), speech societies (25), and those societies devoted to the promotion of health and social custom reforms (8) (Sang 1995: 275).

In much the same way as the modern West, the ancient Chinese were thought to have paid considerable attention to sports and their military spirits and the military strength of the imperial state had been strong. The *Book of Rites* were quoted as legitimatizing sports activities. With the passage of time, however, the Chinese disparaged sports and

in this way weakened their military spirits and state strength. But the contemporary efforts of 'preserving the race' and 'defending the nation' (*baozhong baoguo*) could be nothing but empty talks if the elites and the common people were not cultivated with the bodily strength and courage necessary for military and political contests (*Su Bao* 1903: March 16).

The current weakness and vulnerability of the Chinese nation and its citizenry could be transformed only by practicing army gymnastics, which prepared its citizens for war and more importantly cultivated in them a collective and strong sentiment against the enemies. Military exercises and physical education were important because health was the prerequisite of all kinds of mental activities and competence on the part of the citizens. Sports also constituted the physical basis of moral action, as health was indispensable for supporting one's families, friends and nation in situations of emergency and crisis. Finally, sports and health were critical to the progress and evolution of humankind. The primitives were marked by their sluggishness and indifference to pains and pleasures, just as the Chinese were largely insensitive to the pains of their society as inflicted by the imperialist West. Sports were thus critical in sensitizing their affective feeling and identification with the nation, and in this way to reawaken their sense of historic mission to realize the *telos* of human history that is civilization (*Su Bao* 1903: March 16).

In contrast to popular violence, therefore, military citizenship and sports were intended for the control (positive and negative) of affect and

the cultivation of civility among the Chinese, a purpose deemed more important than its practical, proto-military functions. But with the limited efficacy of study societies under the alliance of the gentry merchants with imperial/imperialist domination, the importance assigned to militarism and sports was eventually repudiated in favor of the direct violence of secret societies, which were accordingly identified as the spearheads of revolution *and* civilization. While bandits and outcasts exhibited 'barbaric' traits, they were said to possess civilities like courage and solidarity in their peculiar ways. It signified the gradual approval of violence among the Chinese intellectuals as a legitimate method of importing civilization and enhancing state strength *via revolution*.

Comparison between Meiji Japan and Late Qing China:

The Problem of the State's Monopolization of Power

As with early modern Europe, the notion of 'civilization' had occupied a prominent place in the state-building process in late Qing China. It is important to note the study society movement in China had its precedent in Meiji Japan, where study societies (*gakukai*) were designed to promote "civilization and enlightenment" (*bunmei kakai*) among the samurai and people. But while in early modern Europe the ideas and practices of 'civilization' were originated from the power centers of the absolutist courts, those articulated by the Japanese study societies were eventually adopted and elicited by the centralizing Meiji state as the

ideological foundation of its militarism and imperialism. By comparison, the study societies in late Qing China were distinctive in its efforts to cultivate a culture of civility *without presupposing* the monopolization of military and political powers by the state.

As a rule, 'civilization' and the closely related notion of 'society' both presuppose and underlie the state's monopolization of power. The absolutist and later imperialist state formation in Western Europe and Tokugawa Japan are two notable examples in which the cultures of 'civilization' firstly flourished among the ruling elites and eventually spread to the common people. In both cases 'civilization' entailed the 'taming' or social and political control of the elites by the absolutist rulers and later of the citizens by the rationalized state bureaucracies. On the other hand, the colonial state power in India was legitimated and institutionalized as part of the imperialist project of Britain to civilize the indigenous, 'barbaric' peoples all over the world.

Where the monopolization of state power was partial and ineffective as in nineteenth-century Germany, 'culture' and 'community' substituted 'civilization' and 'society' to be the catchwords in the Chinese nationalist project of state formation. While the state-building in China was likewise nationalist in character, the inward-looking, exclusivist and fascist connotations of 'culture' and 'community' never took hold under the condition of de-monopolization of state power. It was reflected in the manifold differences of Guomindang China, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy, despite the adoption of fascist trappings like

the Blue Shirts in Jiang Jieshi's New Life Movement. By contrast, 'civilization' and 'society' were embraced with enthusiasm among the late Qing and early Republican intellectuals, even though they were fully aware of their imperialist implications. Finally, when 'civilization' is eventually adopted by Communist China, it represents a renewed effort by the state to reshape the urban neighborhoods of pre-Olympic Beijing and its exercise of disciplinary power over the rural areas. In any case it presupposes the absolute sovereignty and biopower of the state over its territories and subjects.

Puzzles thus arise concerning the conditions, processes and consequences of study societies as part of a civilizing movement that emerged under the gradual disintegration of the state. An easy answer can be found in the diffusion of ideas and practices of 'civilization' from the imperialist West via Meiji Japan. While undoubtedly the late Qing notions of civilization and society were heavily influenced by, if not directly adopted from, its Meiji counterparts, they were further articulated and elaborated in accordance with the peculiar context of late Qing China, in particular the pressing problems of modern nation-state formation. The elaboration of these ideas in terms of 'Confucian religion' and 'military citizenship' had neither precedents nor equivalents even in Meiji Japan. Be that as it may, the focus of this paper is not so much on the origins of ideas and ideologies than on their practical meanings and functions in the study society initiatives and their efforts to civilize the Chinese.

This paper does not attempt a full-fledged comparison between the study societies in Meiji Japan and late Qing China. However, the comparative aspects of study societies are nevertheless crucial for our analysis of the Chinese case. For the study societies in both Japan and China, 'civilization' referred above all to such things as freedom, equality and independence that were seen to be exemplified by the 'civilized' citizens and the strong Western nation states. At the practical level, the 'civility' in question entailed the control of affect or emotion that was held to be indispensable for the emerging nation-states to triumph and survive their competition with the imperialist powers. Positively the control referred to the commitments of individual and collective sentiments towards the nations, whereas negatively it consisted of the repression of any impulsive and violent acts that would jeopardize their competition with the West.

While internal pacification was largely achieved in Japan during the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods, the study society movement was eventually co-opted and incorporated by the centralizing Meiji state after a succession of spectacular military successes, in particular its victory over China in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894. The notion of 'civilization' was adopted and transformed into the ideological foundation of Japan militarism. The former emphasis on freedom, equality and civilization was repudiated, though not unanimously, by the samurai intellectuals, who chose either to join the government or to rebuild the abortive 'freedom and civil right' movement.

The year 1894 was also the turning point for late Qing China. After successive military defeats, the late Qing witnessed the rise of popular objections against the state's extractions of military expenditures and the payment of indemnities. It also experienced ever-escalating religious cases, in which popular (and elite) violence was directed against the foreigners, the Christians, and at times the local officials protecting them. While the enhancement of civility and thereby societal and state strength was a predominant theme shared by the study societies in China and Japan, the experiences of political and cultural conflicts placed a strong stamp on the meanings and practices of 'civilization' in the case of late Qing China.

Specifically, the study societies were largely oriented to the control of fanatical, and hence 'barbaric', use of violence against imperialism on the one hand, and the sublimation of egoistic, and hence equally 'barbaric', traits of the people into an affective identification with the Chinese nation and its fate on the other hand. With the breakdown of state power, however, the study society movement encountered tremendous resistance from an alliance of social and political powers at the local level, such that its civilizing offensives remained limited in scope and impact. While the themes of freedom and equality were retained, they were eventually incorporated into the revolutionary movement. In particular the Communist Party originated from study societies like the 'New Citizenry Study Society' (*xinmin xuehui*) and the 'Enlightenment Society' (*juewushe*), of which Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai were once active members (Dirlik 1989; Van de Ven

1991). But in the process the notions of 'civilization' and 'society' eventually gave way to 'socialism' and 'class' as the legitimating devices of revolutionary violence.

Conclusion

The frequent military defeats led to the 'demonopolization' of the imperial power and a crisis of legitimacy. These in turn provoked a series of anti-Christian conflicts and the Boxer Rebellion, and contributed to the growth of Confucian fundamentalism among the militarized and conservative elites and to the rise of national identity among the Chinese. The military defeats created new cultural and political spaces for the study societies to intervene in local and national arenas and to address the political crises by devising the symbolic and practical means of 'civilization.' From this follows the salience of 'civilization' in Hunan, where the rise of local autonomy and self-government enhanced traditionalism and anti-foreignism. On the other hand, the currency of 'civilization' in Shanghai owed to the extraterritorial rights of the imperialist concessions, thereby creating a relatively pacified environment and constraining the rise of radical politics.

Throughout the late Qing, the notions of "civilization," "society," and "civility" were articulated, practiced and institutionalized in the study societies as emergent and compromised responses to the

challenges of strong imperialist powers, the decline of the imperial state, the legitimation of the emerging nation-state, and the rise of a nascent Chinese nation. Closely related to these functional demands are four interrelated symbolic meanings of civility: *conferral of status honor* (competition), *control of popular violence* (domination), *construction of cultural tradition* (legitimation), and *constitution of societal solidarity* (identification). During the reform era, the notion of 'Confucian religion' and the ritual practices of 'mission' had been advanced in response to the relative importance of imperial domination and ideological legitimation. The legitimacy of the study society movement had to be sought in the reconstruction of Confucian ideology and the recruitment of official membership and patronage. On the other hand, 'military citizenship' and 'sports' were articulated and practiced during the revolutionary era to cope with the increasingly pressing problems of international competition and national identification. The transition was precipitated by the Boxer Rebellion, which seriously weakened the power and legitimacy of the imperial state and devalued the utility of religion as a possible basis of national identification. The emphasis on the military reflected the progressive weakening of state power and this provided the room for the study societies to directly engage in quasi- and even proto-military actions against imperialism.

The demonopolization of state power contributed to new patterns of class coalition and the state's eventual failure to build the modern Chinese nation-state by 'civilized', non-violent means. Specifically, it led to the alliance of militarized and traditionalistic gentry with the masses

against the imperialists in the economically backward region of Hunan. This led to the 'deflation' or undervaluation of the meanings of 'civilization' and consequently the rise of revolutionary violence with a fanatic, mob character. By comparison, the alliance of commercialized and apparently progressive gentry with the imperialist and imperial powers against the masses and the radical intellectuals in Shanghai brought about the 'inflation' or overvaluation of 'civilization' and the rise of revolutionary violence of an opportunistic, elitist character.

Methodologically, this article confronts the problem of causal generalization where there are too many variables and too few cases. The uniqueness of historical cases, especially the development of study societies in China and Japan, defies explanation involving nomological laws and statistical regularities. But it does not preclude attempts at sociological explanation. By exploring the form of social mechanism, it is possible to examine the complexity of social forces and processes operating in various circumstances. By specifying the initial conditions of the study society movement in China and Japan, one is possible to highlight the general mechanisms of war-making, competition and state formation essential for producing the distinctive patterns of the civilizing process in these countries. In the final analysis, historical particularity and theoretical generality can be reconciled in the study of a single case and can test the existing theories of state formation and civilization.

Glossary of Chinese and Japanese Terms

Aiguo xueshe	愛國學社
Aili	愛力
Banyou jiaohua zhiguo	半有教化之國
Baozhong baoguo	保種保國
Bunmei kakai	文明開化
Datong	大同
Fuqing mieyang	扶清滅洋
Gakukai	學會
Gongyi	公義
Gongli	公理
Huangdi	黃帝
Jiao'an	教案
Jingzhong Ribao	警鐘日報
Juewushe	覺悟社
Junguomin zhuyi	軍國民主義
Junli	軍禮
Kongjiao	孔教
Kongzi jinian	孔子紀年

Civilization and Competition

Nan xuehui	南學會
Nuti jiaoyu	奴隸教育
Pingquan	平權
Qun	群
Ren	仁
Shehui	社會
Sien	私恩
Siwanwan zhizhong	四萬萬之眾
Subao	蘇報
Taiping	太平
Wenmin	文明
Wuxu	戊戌
Xiangbao	湘報
Xinmin xuehui	新民學會
Xuehui	學會
Xunzi	荀子
Yesu jinian	耶穌紀年
Yijiao	翼教
Zhongguo jiaoyuhui	中國教育會

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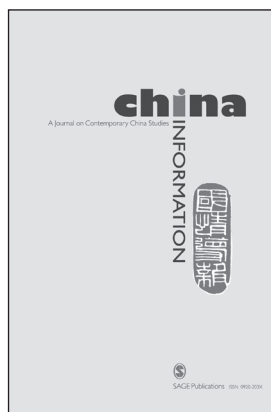
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中華民國期刊論文索引影像系統

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香港中文期刊論文索引

港澳期刊網

2010年春/夏號 ■ 第38期

香港研究

新聞報道量對香港選舉投票率的影響
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中國的憲政與民主

中國憲法中關於「人的尊嚴」的論述
偶像崇拜的變遷與民主化進程

全球化與勞工

中國勞動教養之流變、困境與出路
全球化與台灣社福外勞的引入 [研究札記]

書評特輯

2010年秋/冬季號 ■ 第39期

電影電視的社會含義

從中國主旋律電影到有主旋律意識的商業電影
日本電視劇在香港[研究札記]

中國的制度變革與挑戰

中國的城市轉型與單位制社區變遷[研究札記]
司法獨立與司法民主：孰能實現司法正義？[研究札記]
中國堅定積極分子的形成[研究札記]

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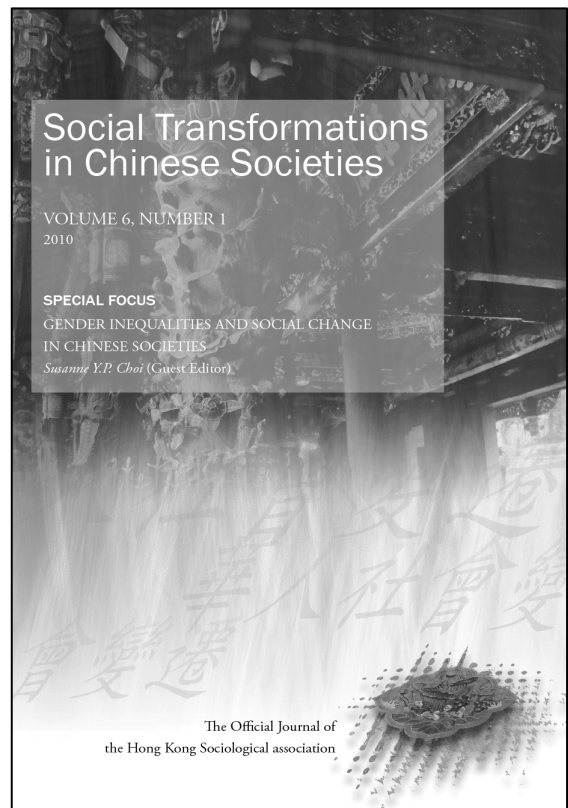
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Marginalization in China: Recasting Minority Politics

Edited by Siu-Keung Cheung, Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, Lida V. Nedilsky

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This collection of historical and contemporary accounts of minority formation debunks popular misconceptions about China's highly centralized state and seemingly homogeneous society. Drawing on archival research, interviews, and field work, it documents how state and citizens meet in a politics of minority recognition and highlights China's growing awareness of rights.

Praises for *Marginalization in China*

"Under China's regime of graded citizenship, 'minorities' are variously defined by ethnicity, class, gender and geography. Such state-imposed labels and their marginalizing effects are being vigorously challenged by minority strategies for recognition and rights. The authors of *Marginalization in China* make a compelling case that the struggles of minorities are at the forefront of an emerging Chinese civil society."—Aihwa Ong, Social Cultural Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley

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"Like every major society in the post-Cold War era, China struggles to find national unity in the midst of ethnic, religious, and regional diversity. This timely new book gives us a fresh look at these struggles, and new consideration of the political, social, and moral challenges they pose. It is especially valuable for providing a historical context for present-day challenges."—Richard Madsen, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and China Studies, University of California, San Diego

"*Marginalization in China* prompts readers to rethink many central issues: how minority groups refashion state-imposed labels; how nation building is shaped by the contention between state structures and indigenous agencies; and how identity formation and interest representation are negotiated along conflicting class, gender, religious, and ethnic lines. This is a rich and thought-provoking book that should be read closely and one that deserves a wide audience."—Tak-Wing Ngo, Leiden University, The Netherlands

"What makes this volume innovative is its rather broad conceptualization of 'minority.' This is one of the first English language volumes to provide a wider analytical gaze at the politics of social marginalization, making an important contribution to the academic discourse on multiculturalism."—James Leibold, Politics and Asian Studies, La Trobe University, Australia



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