

Few concepts have exerted a greater influence on Chinese public discourse and social reality in the 20th century than the concept of "revolution" (*geming* 革命). Traditionally linked to the forceful overthrow of a despotic ruling house through a virtuous successor, the word *geming* in the late Qing dynasty came to emerge as a novel concept of envisioning fundamental political and social change based on notions of popular sovereignty and liberty. Starting in the early 1920s, political parties tried to monopolize the concept for their particular visions of future development and persecuted their real or imagined adversaries as "counterrevolutionaries." Even after the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, the concept retained supreme importance as different views regarding China's development path emerged within the party, ultimately culminating in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. After Mao's death in 1976, the concept of "revolution" was gradually complemented and ultimately replaced with the evolutionary concepts of "reform" (*gaige* 改革) and "development" (*fazhan* 发展) in official terminology, while within counter-discourses the concept was revived to criticize increasing social inequality.

The following article covers the earliest stages of this long-term process of diachronic conceptual change. It raises the question of how the modern concept of "revolution," signifying both the forceful overthrow of an existing order and long-term structural changes within all spheres of state and society,¹ was introduced, adapted, and reconfigured in Chinese discourses during the last years of the Qing dynasty. After a brief theoretical discussion regarding the mechanisms of semantic change, the article analyzes how Japanese and Western conceptual innovations unsettled the classical notions of dynastic change. The analysis is divided into two parts: In the first section, covering the years up to 1902, the article shows how historical examples provided the blueprint for discussions about the desirability of revolution in China as opposed to gradual political reforms. In 1903, the concept of "revolution" became charged with emphatic claims of historical necessity. "Revolution" came to signify competing visions of future change, which included a wide variety of choices, ranging from narrow political conceptions such as the overthrow of Manchu rule to broader definitions addressing questions of social inequalities. The rise of the concept of "revolution" considerably undermined belief in the monarchy as an immutable order and led to an envisioning of state and society as shapeable entities. The article makes no claim for completeness, but rather aims to highlight the interrelation of semantic and societal changes during this crucial period of conceptual innovation.²

1 Koselleck et al. 1984, 654.

2 The usage of the concept of "revolution" as a meta-narrative within the scientific community to characterize Chinese developments since the mid-19th century is not part of this endeavor.

Semantic Change

The question of how diachronic semantic change takes place is one of the main points of contention between conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) and Foucaultian discourse analysis. The former commonly posits a referential nexus between a certain concept and extra-discursive reality. Semantic change therefore has been explained as the consequence of four possible constellations: first, the relation between term and referent remains stable over time, resulting in semantic continuity; second, extra-discursive conditions change, necessitating a redefinition of the term in question; third, the meaning of a certain term changes but the extra-discursive conditions remain unaltered, demanding the use of alternative terms to fill the void; and, finally, the meanings of a certain term and the described referent both change, resulting in a decoupling that is only rediscovered later by the historian.³ Semantic or conceptual change is accordingly perceived as both “indicator” and “factor”⁴ of societal changes, yet the mechanisms of interaction between both spheres remained vague at best. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, has developed a complex theory of how discourses are regulated and structured.⁵ Yet, its practitioners have remained much more hesitant, not to say averse, to including non-discursive contexts as factors of explanation. The meaning of a certain concept therefore is not derived from external referents but stabilized through chains of semantic references within language only. These chains of references, however, can always be reconfigured, since meaning is only temporarily stabilized, owing to the constant “sliding”⁶ of the signified below the semantic fixation of a certain term.

Defining the interrelation between semantic concepts and societal changes has remained a controversial issue. Niklas Luhmann has pointed out the necessity of correlating semantic change with processes of societal differentiation.⁷ Certain concepts accordingly gain discursive prominence and societal acceptance only if the exemplified meaning can be successfully linked with and actualized through pragmatic language usage. The relation between semantics and social structure does not necessarily evoke a mirror image between a society and its communicative or symbolic practices; semantics rather may advance by probing yet uncharted possibilities or lag behind by continuing to employ anachronistic concepts, until the political efforts “to stabilize traditional concepts within a changed political environment” become too great.⁸ Ultimately, Luhmann describes an endless evolutionary process of correlating semantic change with increasingly complex societal differentiation. While he does not explicate the question of how the correlation between semantic and societal changes takes place in detail, the aspect of focusing on pragmatic language use – the capacity to link certain terms with common or group-specific experiences and thus to communicate successfully within a particular discursive and societal environment – appears to be a way of bridging the chasm between the realms of language and society, without either being content with merely tracing a self-generating discourse or by reviving idealist fallacies.

3 Schultz 1979, 65–67.

4 Koselleck 1972, XIV.

5 Cf. Sarasin 2003, 10–60.

6 The catchphrase of the “incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier” can be traced back to Lacan 1977, 154.

7 Luhmann 1993a, 15. Among the few works that include Luhmann’s approach are Lessenich 2003, 12–14 and Schrader 2011, 12.

8 Luhmann 1993b, 8.

In the following, semantic change will be analyzed by employing a tripartite scheme proposed by Willibald Steinmetz. It posits three complementary trends or mechanisms that are helpful in refining our understanding of how semantic change takes place. The first trend might be explained as semantic "irritation"⁹ which occurs when words and concepts are imported from other language environments. In the Chinese case, the example of Meiji-era Japan has played a prominent role in explaining how new concepts were devised and shaped through foreign language imports. Japanese *kanji*, as "return graphic loan-words,"¹⁰ eased the adaptation of new meanings within the Chinese language environment and thereby unhinged pre-established semantic boundaries. The concept of "revolution" is a case in point. However, semantic change may not be simply reduced to an adoption of preexisting Japanese or Western terms and correlated concepts, which were then imposed on a static society by a handful of foreign-educated theorists and revolutionaries. In the process of translation and especially through later semantic reconfigurations, these concepts were adapted in various old and new chains of references to express experiences or expectations within Chinese society, resulting in highly diverse conceptualizations of change.

The flourishing of the concept of "revolution" and the attempts at linking it, alongside the simultaneously emerging notions of popular sovereignty, natural rights, nationalism, society, and others, with contemporaneous experiences may be seen as an example of the second trend: the gain in "strategic practical value" (*strategischer Gebrauchswert*)¹¹ of certain terms and concepts within a specific discursive environment. The question is not whether a certain term matched extra-discursive reality, but whether it provided the possibility of bundling experiences and expectations successfully, whatever the measure of success might be in a particular situation.¹² It thus seems imperative to pay attention to the reshaping of semantic fixations throughout a constant process of communicative interaction. Indeed, the history of the concept of "revolution" in China may be described as an ongoing contest aimed at defining the extent and speed of desired changes. While individual actors played an important role in aggregating disparate social experiences into new concepts,¹³ they were ultimately unable to determine the societal acceptance of their redefinitions.¹⁴

The third trend presents a negative mirror image of the above and may be explained as the loss of semantic plausibility.¹⁵ Unexpected political experiences or long-term social changes may result in "discursive breaks"¹⁶ or the failure to successfully communicate certain experiences with established terminology. The fate of the traditional concept of the "Heavenly Mandate" (*tianming* 天命) as a pillar of dynastic legitimacy in the late Qing period may serve as an example. Due to the impact of new concepts of

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- 9 Steinmetz 2008, 191.
 10 Liu 1995, 302. For a variety of stimulating essays, cf. Lackner, Amelung and Kurtz 2001.
 11 Steinmetz 2008, 189.
 12 Ibid., 189.
 13 Luhmann (1993a, 19–20) refers to the generation of concepts as "gepflegte Semantik": "Begriffsgeschichtliche Forschungen befassen sich ausschließlich mit gepflegter Semantik. Man wird das Recht zu einer solchen Auswahl nicht bestreiten, wohl aber stets mitdenken müssen, daß sie von der Basis des Sinnprozessierens schon um zwei Stufen abgehoben ist; daß sie sich mit der Verarbeitung der Formen der Verarbeitung von aktuellem Sinn befaßt."
 14 Cf. the introduction of this volume, in which Kai Vogelsang uses the metaphor of the "invisible hand of society" to characterize this correlation.
 15 Steinmetz 2008, 188.
 16 Sarasin 2003, 60.

constitutional monarchy and popular sovereignty, recourse to the “Heavenly Mandate” in order to legitimate dynastic rule failed to adequately capture the changing expectations and experiences.

Without political constraints, such concepts vanished over time and were replaced by others. Yet, the role of the ruling elites and their interference in the constant process of semantic change needs to be accounted for as well. While the Qing tried to suppress the new concept of “revolution,” even by banning the term from world-history text books,¹⁷ it was ultimately unable to suppress the expression of dissent. The totalizing communist party-state could later, at least temporarily, inhibit semantic change in the public sphere and fix conceptual meanings through censorship and exegetical bonding.¹⁸ The Qing court was in a much weaker position. The existence of leased territories and foreign concessions provided varying degrees of safety for radical opponents, who continued to voice alternative conceptualizations of social and political change publicly. The novel concept, however, did not immediately replace classical notions associated with the term *geming*, since the old chains of references continued to shape new layers of meaning, as will be shown below.¹⁹

Conceptual Germination

Traditional Discourse and the Japanese Impact

The phrase *geming*, later used to denote the concept of “revolution,” carries a long and checkered semantic heritage in Chinese history. *Geming* appears only sporadically in the Confucian classics and in Chinese historiography but nevertheless achieved prominent political and scholarly attention because it addressed the question of legitimate rule. The semantic overlap between classical and modern renderings of the phrase in addressing notions of change and leadership transition is apparent, which merits a brief history of the word *geming*. In late 19th-century discourses many scholars indeed referred to conventional usages of the term. The earliest and most often cited reference derives from the Zhou dynasty *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) and discusses the dethronement of the last kings of the Xia and Shang dynasties:

Through the changes of heaven and earth the four seasons are completed. [The kings] Tang and Wu changed the mandate [of the Xia and Shang dynasties] in accordance with the will of Heaven and in response to the wishes of men. Times of change are great indeed!²⁰

Geming here signifies a verb-object compound, commonly translated as “changing the mandate,” and legitimates the overthrow of despotic rulers with reference to two different sources: cosmology and popu-

17 In July 1908, the Qing Ministry of Education demanded that all references to the French Revolution in a popular course book on world history, published by the private Shanghai *Zuoxinshu* 作新社 publishing house, should delete the term “revolution” and, depending on the context, replace it with notions of “chaos” (*luan* 亂) or “rebellion” (*zaofan* 造反), cf. Wang 2012, 16–19. I would like to thank the author for providing me with a copy of the unpublished manuscript.

18 Cf. Apter and Saich 1994, 263–293.

19 Even in the early 1960s, the traditional semantics of *geming* were still employed in various attempts of “local emperors” to establish their respective dynasties in China’s countryside. An internal report of the Hebei Propaganda Department (Hebei shengwei xuanchuanbu 1963) mentions the attempted founding of seven new dynasties between 1960–1962 in Hebei province alone.

20 天地革而四時成，湯武革命，順乎天而應乎人，革之時義大矣哉！ Cf. Schilling 2009, 161. “Indem Himmel und Erde sich wenden, vollenden sich die vier Jahreszeiten. Indem die Herrscher Tang und Wu den Befehl wendeten, folgten sie dem Himmel und entsprachen den Menschen. Die Zeit der Wende ist wahrhaft groß!”

lar sentiment. It further bears a strong analogy to patterns of change in the world of natural phenomena, similar to the Latin *revolutio*,²¹ and evokes a naturalized conception of cyclic dynastic change. Within the Confucian historiographical tradition, the phrase coalesced into a fairly coherent concept (Tang Wu *geming* 湯武革命), which linked the overthrow of a previous dynastic ruling house, the accompanying change of the ruling family name, and the establishment of new political institutions with the notion of *geming*.²² Yet, the inherent changeability of dynastic rule presented a dilemma. It rendered political autocracy vulnerable to claims of new leadership, witnessed through popular uprisings or portents of change. Within official historiography, the phrase *geming* therefore was by and large restricted to the description of historical events, or it was retrospectively invoked by founding emperors, who claimed that the successful establishment of their rule surpassed all previous instances of dynastic change.²³

There were other concepts regarding the transfer of dynastic legitimacy or even the possibility of a justified regicide. The mythical emperor Yao was praised for his peaceful abdication (*shanrang* 禪讓) in favor of emperor Shun. The *Mengzi*, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of popular sentiment and the personal qualities of the ruler for retaining the "Heavenly Mandate." If the ruler was unable or unwilling to fulfill his proper functions and thus harmed the people, he was not to be perceived as a ruler but as a thief, who was to be treated as such. Although there is no mentioning of the phrase *geming* in the *Mengzi*, commentaries and discussions clearly linked the questions of legitimate rule and rightful resistance.²⁴

During the eighth century, the phrase "Tang Wu *geming*" was first exported to Japan as part of the translation of the *Mengzi* and several of its commentaries. The phrase *geming*, rendered as *kakumei*, had no immediate equivalent in Japanese and it underwent prominent changes since dynastic continuity rather than circular changes presented the pillar of the Japanese imperial system. By the end of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868) at the latest, the inherently destabilizing dimension of the phrase was expurgated in scholarly writings. The founders of the Shang and Zhou dynasties were instead decried as murderers in thus reenforcing the overarching concept of dynastic continuity.²⁵ *Kakumei* was linked instead with efforts of strengthening imperial rule through comprehensive reforms from above. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 can be seen as the epitome of this semantic shift, which found expression in various semantic references linking the Meiji emperor's reform measures with *kakumei*.²⁶

The meaning ascribed to *kakumei* was further complicated by the translation of works on European history and politics into Japanese, a major component of the emperor's efforts at modernization. The case of the French Revolution was especially perplexing, since the linkage of the concept of "revolution" with notions of popular sovereignty and the overthrow of the *ancien régime* ran counter to the rhetoric of imperial reforms from above. Japanese textbooks reserved the phrase *kakumei* for the abstract historical designation of the period and characterized the specific events of the French Revo-

21 Koselleck et al. 1984, 669–671.

22 Late Qing scholars most often referred to Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 (574–648) *Yijing* commentary to explain the passage: 計王者相承, 改正易服, 皆有變革, 而獨舉湯、武者, 蓋舜、禹禪讓, 猶或因循; 湯、武干戈, 極其損益, 故取相變甚者, 以明人革也, Cf. Li Xueqin 2001, 238.

23 Zhang Tingyu 1984, 20.

24 Cf. Ommerborn et al. 2011, 209–213.

25 Chen Jianhua 2000, 9.

26 Chen Jianhua 1999, 360.

lution with pejorative phrases such as “chaos” or “rebellion.”²⁷ Japanese adaptations of the former Chinese phrase *geming* therefore were by no means uniform and reflected varying degrees of semantic irritation of Chinese pragmatic language usage.

The semantic innovations within Japanese discourse were critical for the reconceptualization of *geming* in the late Qing dynasty (1644–1912). The returned loanword increasingly upset the previously established linguistic boundaries and resulted in new meanings for the classical notion of dynastic change. The first traces of these influences can be found in the works of Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905), who used the term *geming* to describe the reforms of the Meiji emperor in his *Riben guozhi* 日本國志 (*History of Japan*) in 1887.²⁸ Shortly afterwards, journalist Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–1897) transcribed passages from Japanese books on world history in his *Faguo zhibilue* 法國志略 (*General History of France*).²⁹ While he used *geming* to describe the French Revolution as an historical event preceding the Bourbon restoration, he stressed its brutality and common suffering. The storming of the Bastille and other major events were framed accordingly with the notion of *chaos* (*zuoluan* 作亂) along the lines of Japanese practice.³⁰ The widely read book even led later radical thinkers such as Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1868–1936) to exclaim in 1897 that “revolution should be avoided by way of political reform [*gezheng* 革正].”³¹ By the mid-1890s, the phrase *geming* appeared sporadically in Chinese discourse with references to either the Meiji Restoration or the French Revolution, yet classical allusions to dynastic change were not eliminated and most references still invoked the example of emperors Tang and Wu.

Revolution and Rebellion

In the wake of the Qing Empire’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese War, a general sense of crisis predominated, especially among China’s cultural elites. Yan Fu’s 嚴復 (1854–1921) translation of Herbert Spencer’s (1820–1903) works on social Darwinism, published in Chinese in 1896, had a distinct impact on discussions centering on how to avoid the fate of national dismemberment and foreign colonization. Although the perception of inevitable political change was widely shared, “revolution” ranked low on the agenda. While classical conventions still dominated the usage of *geming*, English and Japanese semantic influences can clearly be discerned by the emergence of novel phrases such as “revolutionary party” (*gemingdang* 革命黨). The semantic field associated with the term *geming* in the beginning was therefore closely correlated with classical denominations of local upheavals such as “rebellion” (*zaofan* 造反), “chaos,” (*luan* 亂) or “uprising” (*qiyi* 起義). Leaders of local uprising were officially labeled with the pejorative phrase “rebels” (*panni* 叛逆 or simply *ni* 逆), and while self-

27 Ibid., 361.

28 Cf. Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng 2008, 370.

29 It remains uncertain, whether the book’s first draft, dating to 1871, ever appeared in print. The considerably expanded edition of 1890 (*Chongding Faguo zhibilue* 重定法國志略) exerted much greater influence, cf. Cohen 1974, 121.

30 Cf. Chen 2000, 30–36. Wang’s description of the French Revolution, however, was not a simple translation from Japanese textbooks, cf. Cohen 1974, 125–128. In line with Confucian tradition, he emphasized the moral qualities of the ruler rather than constitutional checks and balances to prevent misrule. The populace appears (127) as passive and reactive: “[W]hen the people rebelled, it was not because they were rebellious by nature but because the monarch’s behavior had driven them to rebel.”

31 Zhang Binglin 1897, 6b.

descriptions as "revolutionaries" are said to have taken place after 1895,³² textual evidence may only be found after the Boxer Rebellion of 1900–1901.

The first calls to overthrow the existing order and replace it with constitutional rule developed within transnational conspirative networks at the empire's margins after 1895. Sun Yat-sen 孙逸仙 (1866–1925) emerged as China's first "professional" revolutionary, having gained an international reputation through his abduction by Qing agents in the Chinese embassy in London in 1896.³³ Sun had been among the leaders of the failed Guangzhou uprising in 1895, although at this point he had neither made a name for himself as an original thinker, nor had he used the term *geming* to characterize his aims. The closest approximation to a political program of the Guangzhou conspirators had been published in Hong Kong's *China Mail* in March 1895. Through the influence of Sun's early patron Ho Kai 何啟 (1859–1914), it depicted the emergence of a Chinese "reform party,"³⁴ which aimed to overthrow the Manchus and engage in "constitutional upheaval":

It is the intention of the revolutionists, who belong to no secret society and are banded together for the sole purpose of reforming the government [...] to affect a coup d'état by peaceful means if possible. What they desire [...] although it seems impossible to realize any such feeling amongst a body of Chinamen, is a constitutional upheaval, to rid their country of the iniquitous system of misrule which has shut out China from Western influence, Western trade, and Western civilization.³⁵

The article draws no clear line of division between the notions of "reform" and "revolution." The aim of overthrowing the present structure and of replacing it with constitutional rule qualified to call the conspirators "revolutionists." Yet, at the same time, connotations of chaos and violent upheaval were moderated by dissociating the "reform party" from previous Chinese rebels such as the Taiping movement. The article obviously catered to its respective audience, British merchants and citizens who needed to be convinced of the advantages of remaining neutral in case of a political coup.

It is not possible to say how far these semantic choices mirrored Sun's own depiction of the events, since no other programmatic documents survive from this period.³⁶ Sun's close associate Chen Shaobai 陳少白 (1869–1934) claims in his posthumously published memoirs that the change from former concepts of "rebellion" to a modern understanding of revolution took place through a dramatic instance of semantic irritation. According to Chen, the conspirators were unaware of Japanese or Western meanings of "revolution" at the time of the Guangzhou uprising. They only adopted the concept after their flight to Kobe in mid-November 1895, when Japanese newspapers used the phrase *kakumei* to describe the arrival of Sun Yat-sen and his followers:

When we arrived in Kobe, we bought a newspaper to take a look. Although we did not know Japanese at the time, we recognized several Chinese characters and guessed the basic meaning. At a glance, the characters "Sun Yixian of the Chinese Revolutionary Party" impressively stood out before our eyes. Previously, we had thought that only if one intended to become the emperor could this be called "rev-

32 Cf. the references of Chen Shaobai and Feng Ziyou below.

33 The veracity of Sun's dramatic description has repeatedly been questioned, cf. Wong 1986, 115–168.

34 Chinese renderings of the English characterization "reform party" at the time were commonly given as *gexin dang* 革新黨.

35 *China Mail*, 12 March 1895, quoted in Schiffrin 1968a, 73.

36 Unlike the article's depiction, the Guangzhou uprising strongly relied on secret society links and it is well known that Sun held Taiping leader Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–1864) in highest esteem, cf. Wong 1986, 296–297.

olution” and that our movement could only be described as a revolt and nothing more. After seeing this newspaper, the three characters “*gemingdang*” [revolutionary party] were imprinted in our minds.³⁷

Feng Ziyou 馮自由 (1882–1958) describes a similar process of adapting the phrase from the Japanese. Prior to 1895, Feng claims that the later revolutionaries had either used the terms “rebellion,” “uprising,” or “restoration” (*guangfu* 光復) of Han rule after a period of foreign domination to characterize their aims of overthrowing the Manchu dynasty. After arriving in Kobe, Sun and his companions saw a newspaper report entitled “The Leader of the Chinese Revolutionary Party Sun Yixian has arrived in Japan,”³⁸ at which point Sun told Chen Shaobai:

The two characters *geming* originate from the *Book of Changes*’ passage “Tang and Wu changed the mandate in accordance with the will of Heaven, and in response to the wishes of men.” The Japanese call our party a “revolutionary party.” The meaning [of this term] is perfectly suitable. It is fitting that our party in the future should be addressed as a “revolutionary party.” The Japanese initially translated the English “revolution” as *geming*. However, if one looks at the original meaning of the *Yijing* passage “Tang and Wu changed the mandate,” it specifically addresses political reforms. Therefore, it says [in the *zhengyi* commentary of Kong Yingda]: “[They] changed the ruler’s mandate.”³⁹ It is further said that if a change of [dynastic] names occurs, this is called *geming*. After the translated term had been established, all types of great political and social changes were called *geming*. Our people now use [the term] accordingly.⁴⁰

The above accounts reveal the difficulties in relying on later remembrances for tracing semantic change. The observation that prior to 1895 there was no mention of the concept of “revolution” tallies well with the historical record. The dramatized episode of Sun’s adoption of the concept, however, as Chin Tokushin and Yasui Sankichi have shown, is flawed.⁴¹ There are no contemporary newspaper reports in Kobe that describe the Chinese conspirators as revolutionaries. While the first Japanese translations of Marxist texts had employed the word *kakumei* by 1893 at the latest to designate both revolutionary socialist parties (*kakumeiteki shakaiō* 革命的社会党) and the coming communist revolution (*kyōsan-teki kakumei* 共产的革命),⁴² the term in Japanese official discourse was again mostly used to refer to reforms from above. It therefore comes as no surprise that the only references to Sun in Kobe newspapers call the Guangzhou uprising a failed revolt and characterize Sun as a “bandit leader.”⁴³

37 Chen Shaobai 1935, 34: 到了神戶，就買份日報來看看，我們那時，雖然不認識日文，看了幾個中國字，也略知梗概，所以一看，就看見「中國革命黨孫逸仙」等字樣，赫然躍在眼前。我們從前的心理，以為要做皇帝才叫「革命，」我 [sic!] 的行動只算造反而已。自從見了這張報紙以後，就有「革命黨」三字的影像印在腦中了。The wording of the original article is slightly different than the better-known 1956 Taipei reprint edition.

38 Feng Ziyou (1936, 29) gives the title as “Zhina gemingdang shouling Sun Yixian di ri” 支那革命黨首領孫逸仙抵日。

39 Li Xueqin 2001, 238.

40 Feng Ziyou 1936, 29: 革命二字出於易經，湯武革命順乎天而應乎人一語，日人稱吾黨為革命黨，意義甚佳，吾黨以後即稱革命黨可也。按日人初譯英文 Revolution 為革命，但按諸易所謂湯武革命之本義，原專指政治變革而言，故曰革其王命，又曰王者易姓曰革命。自譯名既定，于是關於政治上社會上之大變革，咸通稱曰革命。今國人遂亦沿用之。The subsection of Feng’s discussion is entitled “Geming er zi zhi youlai” 革命二字之由來, 29.

41 Chin Tokushin and Yasui Sankichi 1985, 34.

42 Cf. Lippert 1979, 142.

43 Chin and Yasui 1985, 34. The *Kōbe yūshin nippō* 神戶又新日報 (*Kobe Daily News*) on 10 November 1895 published the account under the title “Guangdong baotu jukui zhi jingli ji jihua” 廣東暴徒巨魁之經歷及計劃。

As Chen Jianhua has documented, the first public reference in Japanese media to Sun as the leader of a "revolutionary party" was a newspaper reprint of the Japanese edition of "Kidnapped in London,"⁴⁴ Sun's account of being captured by agents of the Qing embassy in London, published in English in 1897. The Japanese translation was serialized as "Account of the Capture of the Qing Nation's Revolutionary Party Leader Sun Yixian" (清国革命党領袖孫逸仙幽囚錄) in May 1898 in the *Kyūshū Nippo* (九州日報). It is conceivable that Chen Shaobai and Feng Ziyou referred to this title in their reminiscences and confused the exact circumstances given the forty-year lapse of time.

The propagation of Sun as a challenger to the Qing court was mainly confined to Sun's overseas Chinese supporters and the small but increasing number of Chinese students in Japan. By May 1897, "Kidnapped in London" had already been on sale in Shanghai and Chen Shaobai facilitated the translation of the volume into Japanese by Miyazaki Tōten 宮崎滔天 (1871–1922) in 1898. Japanese parties followed their own agenda in contributing to the heroic image of Sun Yat-sen. Pan-Asianist circles had been looking for ways of effectively influencing Chinese politics after the Japanese victory of 1895. Especially Ōkuma Shigenobu 大隈重信 (1838–1922), Japan's Foreign Minister by 1896, claimed that China would soon be liberated from its present deadlock and that "once a hero should arise, patriotism would well up, and China would resume her place among the powers."⁴⁵ To prepare for the possibility of revolutionary changes in China, the Japanese Foreign Office funded undercover investigative missions to connect with possible future leaders, among them Sun Yat-sen.⁴⁶ His contact was none other than Miyazaki Tōten, who was quickly swayed by Sun's personal charisma and would become one of the most effective propagandists of his cause in Japan. While official Japanese discourse discouraged revolutionary change in China, leading politicians already referred to Sun as the leader of a "revolutionary party"⁴⁷ in private communication by mid-1897.

Around the same time, the phrase "revolutionary party" (*gemingdang* 革命黨) as a general denomination first appeared in Chinese discourse, derived as part of a translation from a Japanese news item in the *Shiwubao* 時務報. The article discussed the role of political parties within a constitutional monarchy and drew a clear division between "regular" political parties (*zhengdang* 政黨) and "revolutionary parties," which aimed at "overthrowing the government."⁴⁸ The new phrase did not catch on immediately. When Sun Yat-sen was first mentioned by name five months later in May 1897 in a Chinese newspaper, the Shanghai-based *Shenbao* 申報, the depiction was framed in the traditional rhetoric of local bandits and rebels.⁴⁹ The article discussed Guangdong's role as a hotbed of revolts and mentioned numerous rebel leaders, most notably Taiping leader Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–1864). Sun was merely mentioned as one among other rebels:

44 Chen Jianhua 2009, 21. For the original, cf. Sun 1897.

45 Jansen 1954, 53.

46 Bergère 1998, 72–73. Cf. Jansen 1954, 64–68.

47 The details of the initiative aimed at influencing Chinese developments through the cultivation of pro-Japanese factions and had been masterminded by liberal parliamentarian Inukai Ki 犬養毅 (1855–1932). In a personal letter dating back to June 1897, Inukai advised Miyazaki to familiarize himself with the aims and vocabulary of the "revolutionary party," although the potential risk or later payoff remained unclear at the time, cf. Chen Jianhua 2009, 22.

48 *Shiwubao* 13/01/1897, 23 ("Zhengdang lun" 政黨論): 非我所謂政黨也, 革命黨本以顛覆政府為志。The article was translated by Kozyo Satakichi 古城貞吉 (1866–1949), who was among the most prolific translators of Japanese articles in the late Qing and published over 600 translations in the *Shiwubao*.

49 On the "domestication" of the foreign funded *Shenbao*, cf. Mittler 2007, 13–45

Last year, criminal rebel [*nifan* 逆犯] Sun Wen, also named Sun Yixian, organized a clique [*ju dang*] in Guangdong. They planned a large-scale rebellion and privately purchased arms and ammunition to take the city [Guangzhou] by surprise at a certain time. [...]. Just as the border officials wished to take him by force, criminal Sun had already escaped through foreign networks. Although he was caught in our trap, owing to the incompatibility of Chinese and Western laws, we and the foreigners became embroiled in a dispute. His crime thus ultimately remained unpunished.⁵⁰

Despite the international background of China's leading newspaper, established with foreign funding in 1872, it took a fairly conservative stand on Chinese politics until about 1905. While it measured political actions against the law and not against the "Heavenly Mandate," the article employed the official rhetoric of rebellion common to official court descriptions of local uprisings. By January 1898, the international impact of Sun's account of his kidnapping in London was clearly mirrored in a much lengthier opinion piece published in the *Shenbao*. The article offered substantial background information and now styled Sun and his revolutionary party as the gravest danger to the Qing court:

It is my opinion that the potentially most harmful and most difficult to eradicate [clique] is just the revolutionary party. I have heard that the revolutionary party is headed by the Guangdong criminal rebel Sun Wen. The style of rebel Sun is Yixian. In his youth, he acquired foreign languages and studied medicine in the United States. After finishing his studies, he returned and worked as a physician and pharmacist in various places in Hong Kong and Macao. Whenever he grew fond of something, he wrote it down and turned into a theory, spoke with lofty words and deceived the people. [...]. His conspiratorial intentions have remained unaltered. Whenever he is abroad, he creates revolutionary doctrines and publishes misleading books. Using the pretext of teaching new laws, he brags loudly and loses all self-restraint. Currently, there is a large amount of people who trust and follow him, even among the gentry. They draw false conclusions from his words, compile them into long articles and regard them as doctrines. Having read a few of these makes people lose their composure and draw their swords in indignation.⁵¹

Since the article precedes the first Japanese reference to Sun as the leader of a revolutionary party, the linkage is likely a consequence of Sun's English-language media profile. Although the article does not yet contain a coherent definition for how a revolutionary party differs in organization or outlook from previous rebel groups, the difference in the role attributed to Sun is starkly evident. He is no longer portrayed as one among many bandit leaders; instead, the fairly detailed account of his education, foreign connections, and oral skills clearly set him apart as a revolutionary leader from the usual description of ordinary peasant rebels. The specific appeal of his teachings, which are cast in the semantics of a heretic religious cult, remains obscure, and there is no explanation for why segments of the

50 *Shenbao* 09/05/1897, 1 ("Lun Yuedong diao bing jiao fei shi" 論粵東調兵剿匪事): 去歲，粵中逆犯孫文即孫逸仙聚黨成羣謀為大逆私購軍火，約期襲取堅城。[...]。疆吏正欲嚴為緝捕而孫犯已逃至外洋嗣。雖入我網羅而以中西律法之不同，洋人與我相爭，終不能明正其罪。

51 *Shenbao* 29/01/1898, 1 ("Fang neihuan shuo" 防內患說). 僕以為最足為害而又最末易除者，其惟革命之黨乎。聞革命黨之粵東逆犯孫文為首。孫逆字逸仙，年少通洋文，素習醫於美利堅，業成而回，懸壺香港，澳門諸處。每喜著書立說，大言欺人。[...]。其謀叛之心終於不改。每在海外創為革命之說，刊布妖書，藉口於新法之宣師，大言災災，任情狂吠，一時信從者衆，竟有搢紳士類，附會其言，累牘連篇，著為論說，閱之幾令人髮指毗裂，拔劍激昂。

social elite even followed, seemingly against their better judgment, what is described as irrational and emotionally evocative teachings.

While Sun came to embody "revolution" and was increasingly referred to by others as the leader of a revolutionary party, there are no reliable documents written by Sun or his followers prior to 1903 which would reveal a prominent usage of the concept to justify his activities.⁵² There can be little doubt that Sun himself was filled with a sense of historical mission, which the international echo of his kidnapping further amplified.⁵³ Rather than through theoretical contributions, he had built constituencies among overseas Chinese and, to a much lesser degree, among Qing-dynasty elites through his actions and image-building activities. The importance attached to traditional scholarship impeded the impact of the peasant-born Sun among traditionally educated scholars, for whom cultural capital in the form of patterns of speech and argumentation amounted to expressions of personal cultivation. Such habitual differences contributed to the quick fallout between Sun and the so-called "reformers" around Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929). The debates between both sides became increasingly hostile, sharpening the dichotomy between piecemeal incremental reform and violent revolution – a phrase that during the following years was elevated from a non-defined and lingering threat of a violent overthrow of the present order to a near all-encompassing concept of change.

Revolution Versus Reform

The period between 1898 and 1903 is perhaps best characterized as a time of conceptual germination. At this point, the necessity of conducting wide-ranging political changes had become a subject of open debate. The most widely used term denoting "reform" at the time was *weixin* (維新), which might be translated as "keeping newness" or, with reference to the Japanese case, as "restoration." Other terms included *bianzheng* 變政 ("change of political institutions"), *bianfa* 變法 ("change of rules"), or *gai-liang* 改良 ("reform"), which later emerged as the overarching concept that divided "revolutionaries" from "reformers." During the Hundred Days' Reform, a first attempt at transforming the traditional system was undertaken by the Guangxu emperor 光緒 (reg. 1875–1908) and his advisors. Kang Youwei, the intellectual leader of the Hundred Days' Reform movement, had submitted several memoranda to the court advising structural changes within the political system, based on the examples of foreign countries such as Russia, Japan, and France. For Kang, Japan was the example on which the Guangxu emperor should model his reform measures and archival evidence shows that he submitted a book entitled *Riben Mingzhi bianzheng kao* 日本明治變政考 (*A Study of the Meiji Reforms in Japan*) to the emperor with an accompanying letter stating the existence of five further country studies, including a study of political reform in France.⁵⁴

As has been documented by Kong Xiangji and others, the published versions of the reform memorials, which have provided the basis for most analyses of the events, vary in important aspects from

52 The references to "revolution" prior to 1903 included in Sun's *Collected Works* derive from later published accounts, such as Miyazaki's autobiography and it must remain doubtful whether the expressions were used contemporaneously, cf. Sun Yat-sen 2011, 172–174.

53 Schiffrin 1968b, 450.

54 Kong Xiangji 1998, 60.

those memorials traceable in the Qing archives. While the revised memorials, first published in 1911, prominently mention the term “revolution” when providing historical comparisons, the archival documents avoid the phrase. Kang alluded to the French Revolution in one of the memorials traceable in the archives to point out the dangers awaiting the Qing dynasty should they fail to implement reforms along the lines of the Meiji emperor. It is uncertain, however, whether he ever submitted the accompanying book to the throne. The erudite Kang Youwei was clearly aware of the strategic implications of his semantic choices. In a catalogue of Japanese titles compiled in 1897, he had already included two titles on the French Revolution and even a treatise on the necessity of “religious revolution” (*zongjiao geming* 宗教革命),⁵⁵ which appears to be the earliest Chinese designation of structural changes with the word “revolution.”

Kang most certainly chose to avoid using *geming*, with its allusions to dynastic changeability, for practical strategic reasons, making his arguments acceptable for the Guangxu emperor, whom he wished to take on a role comparable to the Meiji emperor or Peter the Great in 18th-century Russia.⁵⁶ While Kang later changed the titles of his memorials to include the concept of “revolution” as a reference to world historical trends, this act was not akin to advocating the forceful overthrow of the dynastic order in China. Quite to the contrary, by studying the historical experiences of other countries, he came to perceive that revolution would not inevitably result in gaining the Chinese people popular sovereignty, liberty, and equality. In his opinion, a violent overthrow of the Qing would rather prolong the necessary process of modernizing the Chinese state, society, and customs.

Even after having been forced to flee the country after the failed Hundred Days’ Reform, Kang Youwei continued to advocate incremental change and opposed the violent overthrow of the existing order.⁵⁷ While the Japanese pan-Asianists also contacted Kang and recommended a closer cooperation with Sun Yat-sen, his “intransigent elitism”⁵⁸ prevented cooperation with Sun, whom he had alienated with his self-righteousness on several earlier occasions.⁵⁹ Kang reacted sharply as members of his newly founded *Protect the Emperor Society* (*baohuanghui* 保皇會), especially the leading editors of the society’s organ *Qingyi bao* 清議報, Liang Qichao and Ou Jujia 歐榘甲 (1870–1911), started to cooperate closely with Sun in 1899 and flirted with the idea of political revolution. This brief period of cooperation is of more than passing interest, for this encounter of revolutionary activists and reform-minded theoreticians resulted in the first comprehensive conceptualization of “revolution” within Chinese discourse.

On October 25, 1899, Ou Jujia published an important article, in which he characterized “revolution” as the underlying theme of political change over four thousand years of Chinese history. He constructed a genealogy, dating back to the Yellow Emperor and the cultural heroes of old, to trace the development from barbarianism to kinship organization and the modern democratic state, and from serfdom to national independence and personal freedom. These trends should not be seen as foreign-induced or as fundamentally alien to the “yellow race.” Quite to the contrary, not only were the legendary emperors Yao and Shun praised as inventors of democracy by allowing for a voluntary leadership transition, but their

55 Kang Youwei *quanji* 3, 294.

56 Cf. Chen Jianhua 2011, 99.

57 Scalapino and Yu 1985, 53.

58 Bergère 1998, 78.

59 Cf. Schiffrin 1968a, 148.

successors had also overcome parochial kinship ties and thus developed the "seeds of the nation state" (*guojia zhi mengya* 國家之萌芽).⁶⁰ These advances in "civilization" (*wenming* 文明) through the earliest Chinese "revolutions" had been halted by the introduction of monarchic rule, which had poisoned the relations between the rulers and the ruled and turned the state into the purview of a single family.⁶¹

Revolutions in the past millennia had accordingly been led by "fake revolutionaries" (*jia gemingzhe* 假革命者). They had done nothing to advance civilization but instead turned the populace into slaves. The time for a "commoner's revolution" (*shumin geming* 庶民革命) had not been ripe yet, and the bloodshed accompanying each failed attempt had further disheartened the people. Now, however, that the tides of revolution were engulfing every continent, China's fate would soon change as well and the Chinese would partake in the glory of liberty. Just as French revolutionaries like Robespierre (1758–1794) defined revolution as a world-historical mission,⁶² Ou called for new heroes to destroy the prospect of living in a dark, prisonlike age. The article provides the concept with an aura of historical legitimation and, by way of comparison, with a procedural understanding of revolution. Change would come at a price though: "Through the study of history it may be said that if you want to change the destiny [*geming*] of a thousand people, the blood of a hundred people will have to flow."⁶³ Revolutionary violence and suffering could not be avoided, since the old ruling elites would not give up their privileges easily, but, Ou claimed, "revolution is the only way to discard barbarism and approach civilization."⁶⁴

Ou Jujia's article is noteworthy for being the first to link the concept of "revolution" in genealogical fashion with Chinese tradition and the equally novel concept of "nation." No longer did revolution appear as either a dynastic change of names or imperial reforms but as a popular revolution from below, aimed at establishing democracy and liberty. Ou called upon his contemporaries to engage in revolution as a necessary precondition for bringing about the long-dormant traditions of democracy and the Chinese nation-state. He expounded a heroic concept of "national revolution" that was intermingled with racial pride but lacked anti-Manchu sentiments. His criticism focused on the pillars of the monarchical system, irrespective of the ethnic background of the ruling family. The reluctance to link the concept of revolution with older traditions of anti-Manchu prejudices probably contributed to the limited impact of the article on public discourse. Only four years later, many of his arguments were repeated, even verbatim, by others, who came to link national revolution with xenophobia.

Based on Ou Jujia's arguments, a continuation of the exchange and possibly even an alliance between the reformers and the revolutionaries around Sun Yat-sen would have seemed possible in the immediate wake of the failed reform movement. Ou personally met with Sun and remained in close contact throughout 1899, yet cooperation turned out to be impossible due to Kang Youwei's continuing belief in the constructive role of the Guangxu emperor as well as for personal reasons. Kang was not prepared to engage with others at an equal level, or for that matter to defer to another leader, particularly not to Sun Yat-sen, whom he considered an uncultured peasant. He thus rigidly opposed

60 Ou Jujia 1899, 94.

61 Ibid., 95.

62 "La moitié de la révolution du monde est déjà faite; l'autre moitié doit s'accomplir," cf. Carrel 1840, 609.

63 Ou Jujia 1899, 97.

64 Ibid., 97: 革命者, 去野蠻而近文明必經之路也。Later revolutionary tracts would frequently employ these phrases.

future cooperation. Instead, Kang forced Liang Qichao to declare his loyalties⁶⁵ and Ou was left out in the cold, being replaced as editor of the *Qingyi bao* by Mai Menghua 麥孟華 (1875–1915).⁶⁶

This episode merits interest because it reveals, on the one hand, that non-linguistic factors had a strong impact on the alignment of those groups striving for political change. Exchange was further hampered by rhetorical conventions mirroring social status, which prevented future cooperation. To speak successfully not only depended on argumentative consistency, but also on the respective audience. By 1898, the number of Chinese foreign students in Japan, which constituted the journal's readership, was still minuscule, amounting only to about 70. Even by 1902, there were only some 650 students in Japan, while in the year after the termination of the imperial examination system in 1905 numbers swelled to 13,000.⁶⁷ The success of Ou's argument therefore critically depended on social acceptance within the still fairly small intellectual circles engaging in public debates.

By 1902, the division between the “reformers” and the “revolutionaries” further escalated for financial reasons. Prior to 1898, Sun had few competitors for overseas Chinese funding of his attempts to overthrow the Qing. With Kang Youwei abroad and travelling widely, a rivalry for funds developed, which culminated in Kang's public denunciation of the concept of “revolution.” In a 20,000 character-long open letter to overseas Chinese sponsors of the *Protect the Emperor Society*, who had come to question his reform approach, Kang aimed at revealing the dark sides of revolution and at convincing his readers of the benefits of gradual change. Since the letter incited heated debates among Chinese intellectuals regarding the concept of “revolution,” his criticism shall be presented in some detail. Kang opposed viewpoints suggesting that China's future necessitated a political revolution and the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty. Relying on numerous historical examples, he denied the importance of revolution for the Chinese case. He perceived China's belated modernization not to be rooted in the political system (after all, most European countries had retained their monarchies while ceding sovereignty to the populace) or in racial differences, but in the meddling of political schemers, who needed to be removed from power in order to reinstate the Guangxu emperor:

If someone detests that a rat is dwelling in his room and as a consequence decides to burn the house, or if someone abhors that his son is taken hostage by a bandit and decides to kill his son, this has to be considered unwise. [...] Empress dowager Cixi and Ronglu are Manchus; the Emperor is a Manchu as well. When Tang and Wu changed the mandate, they punished the unprincipled Jie and Zhou but not the principled Xia Qi and Wu Ding. To slander a whole country because of the crimes of one or two people and to expel the ones who love us and care about us, can this after all be called a universal principle? Therefore, I would truly prefer not to hear calls aiming at revolution and expunging the Manchus.⁶⁸

65 Schiffrin 1968a, 164.

66 Sang Bing 2002, 63.

67 Bernal 1976, 129.

68 *Kang Youwei quanji* 6, 315: 人有惡鼠之窟其室而自焚其屋，惡賊之質其子而並殺其子，尚為不智；[...] 西后，榮祿滿人也，皇上亦滿人也。滿、武之革命，乃誅無道之桀、紂耳，非誅有道之夏啟、武丁也。以一二人之罪而惡及一國，乃並其愛我思我之人並除之，此豈為公理乎？故僕實不欲聞革命撲滿之言。In his letter “Da nanbei Meizhou zhu Huashang lun Zhongguo zhi ke xing lixian bu ke xing geming shu” 答北美洲諸華商論中國只可行立憲不可行革命書), Kang also pointed out the absurdity of being branded as the leader of a “rebel party” (*nidang* 逆黨) or “bandit gang” (*feihui* 匪會) upon having formed a group to protect the Chinese emperor, *Ibid.*, 331

Citing the classical *geming* concept, Kang absolved the emperor of any blame, reaffirmed his sacred status, and called for restoring (*fubi* 復辟) Guangxu to power. He furthermore decried the revolutionaries' growing anti-Manchism as "pointless" and as an "inexplicable oddity,"⁶⁹ since Manchus and Han had long since amalgamated and formed a joint family. Kang heavily relied on historical comparisons to bolster his arguments. He admonished the advocates of revolution to closely study China's specific situation before applying foreign-derived concepts of tumultuous upheaval. Referring to the example of the French Revolution, Kang pointed out the differences in terms of social and geographical preconditions:

With regard to territory and populace, France does not even equal a tenth of China. However, as soon as the revolution got under way, eighty years of chaos ensued. During the first upheaval, 1,290,000 people were killed in Paris. [In comparison to France] China has ten times as much territory and people; ten thousand times more than Paris. Furthermore, there is no uniform language; mountains and rivers separate the country. With a territory spread over twenty provinces, over two hundred prefectures, and a multitude of 3000 counties, it will be impossible to unite it. Should great chaos occur [in China], then, if one takes the French example as a measure, it would take several hundred years to reestablish order, or at least more than one hundred years.⁷⁰

A revolution would be easy to start but nearly impossible to control, like fire igniting grasslands.⁷¹ The consequences for the populace would be common suffering and declining living standards, and, most importantly, the foreign powers would not watch idly but use the turmoil for their own respective purposes.⁷² In the end, Chinese warlords would be the profiteers of the ensuing chaos, and possibly even a Chinese Napoleon would emerge. Therefore, Kang charged, if the revolutionaries were really interested in achieving tangible results, such as gaining "civil rights" (*minquan* 民權), "liberty" (*ziyou* 自由), or "publicly elected, democratic office holders" (*gongju minzhu guanli* 公舉民主官吏), these goals could be more efficiently achieved through non-violent means:

Civil rights and liberty have to be separated from revolution. Among the over ten European countries, all have civil rights, all can provide liberty, but with the exception of the French Revolution, all other [countries] have a monarch. That being the case, if one aspires to obtain civil rights and freedom, why do these have to rely on a revolution? If the revolution is not accomplished and the country is reduced to mud and ashes, civil rights and liberty will not be obtained. Therefore, if one really has a heart set for saving the country and sincerely loves the people, then it is sufficient to talk about civil rights and freedom, but one does not have to talk about revolution.⁷³

69 Ibid., 326.

70 Ibid., 317: 法國之地與民，不得中國十分之一，而革命一倡，亂八十年。第一次亂，巴黎城死者百廿九萬。中國十倍其地，十倍其民，萬倍於巴黎，而又語言不通，山川隔絕，以二十餘省之大，二百餘府之多，三千餘縣之眾，必不能合一矣。若有大亂，以法亂之例推之，必將數百年而覆定，否亦須過百年而後定。

71 Ibid., 317: 能發之者，誰能收之？若火之一發既燎于原，不可撲滅。

72 Kang chose the well-known *Zhangguo ce* story about the deadlock between the snipe and the clam to describe the situation, *ibid.*, p. 317: 鵝蚌相持，漁人得利，必先為外人有矣，若印度是也。

73 Ibid., 318: 夫民權自由之與革命，分為二者也。歐洲十餘國，皆有民權，皆能自由者，除法國革命外，余皆有君主。然則必欲予民權自由，何必定出於革命乎？革命未成，而國大塗炭，則民權自由且不可得也。是故真有救國之心、愛民之誠，但言民權自由可矣，不必談革命也。

In Kang's view, the advocates of revolution thus needed to seriously consider whether they were willing to unravel societal stability and to sacrifice up to two-thirds of the populace for attaining a future utopia.⁷⁴ Kang Youwei restated his arguments in abridged form in an article published on September 16, 1902 in the journal *Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報, which was edited by Kang's former disciple Liang Qichao in the exile of Yokohama. Kang cautioned against the consequences of political revolution and the danger of splitting China into several small countries. He even referred back to Confucius and Mencius to argue that what *geming* was all about was doing away with tyrants, not simply killing the ruler.⁷⁵ Instead of encouraging hatred of other races, Han and Manchu should stand together and oppose the Western power's encroachment upon Chinese territory under the spirited guidance of the emperor.⁷⁶

Kang's open letter, reprinted soon after as a booklet, engendered impassioned debates among Chinese scholars on the necessity of revolution, which turned out to be instrumental in reformulating the narrow concept of violent upheaval. Two trends become discernible: first, the spectrum of the concept was widened to include a vision of actively reshaping the fundamentals of state and society; and, second, "revolution" came to acquire a clearly nationalist and anti-Manchu connotation. The merging of both trends in 1903 signified the elevation of the concept of "revolution" as a key component of Chinese debates on the subject of desirable future development.

Competing Visions

Revolution as Transformation

Among those who consciously tried to define and shape the discourse on "revolution" in the late Qing era, Liang Qichao played a special role. He emerged as the most influential Chinese publicist in the immediate wake of the Hundred Days' Reform. Despite his brief flirtation with radical political change after his flight to Japan, the concept of "revolution" did not feature prominently in his writings prior to 1902.⁷⁷ He defended the importance of revolution in a letter to Kang Youwei in April 1900, notwithstanding its destructive character, by rousing the passion of liberty among the slavishly minded Chinese.⁷⁸ The overarching concept of political change for him clearly remained "reform" (*weixin*), as is revealed in a short survey article on the different factions aiming at political changes in China. In the accompanying diagrams, the revolutionaries were sketched as the most radical reformers, as a separate group hoping for the destruction of the current political system.⁷⁹

74 Ibid., 325: 故不望其成，但欲其大動大變以警醒之，甘為大火，甘為炸藥，甘為大疫，寧殺三分有二之人，以望將來之大樂。

75 Kang Youwei 1902, 61.

76 Ibid., 66.

77 A frequently cited example for Liang's earliest usage of the concept of "revolution," is his 1899 call for a "poetic revolution" (*shijie geming* 詩界革命), which remained episodic, cf. Chen Jianhua 2000, 40–44.

78 Tang Xiaobing 1996, 106.

79 Liang Qichao 1999, vol. 2, 367–368.

With his growing interest in the role of the state and nationalism from a global perspective,⁸⁰ Liang became increasingly interested in European national revolutions and compared the historical examples with the Chinese situation. He published three heroic portrayals of revolutionary leaders in Hungary, Italy, and France, in which he displayed ambivalence regarding the priorities of societal stability and national liberation. While he glorified Mazzini's attempt at rejuvenating Italy through mass mobilization and ideological education, a growing skepticism becomes discernible in his portrayal of Madame Roland. The dire fate of the heroine is depicted in stark terms and revolution is described as a monster, as an uncontrollable torrent, a "deluge"⁸¹ devouring its participants.

In his essay "Defining *ge*" (*shi ge* 釋革) from December 1902, which might be viewed as an immediate response to Kang Youwei's letter, Liang Qichao presented the most elaborate attempt so far at clarifying the conceptual implications of translating Western and Japanese concepts of "revolution" into Chinese. Liang set out by explaining that the character *ge* combined both the English meanings of "reform" and "revolution," and therefore did not lend itself to easy translation:

"Reform" means to change something for the better by adding or subtracting from what originally existed, as in case of the 1832 "revolution" of the English parliament. The Japanese translate this as "*gaige*" [*kaikaku* 改革] or "*gexin*" [*kakushin* 革新]. The meaning of "revolution" is similar to a fundamental turnover. It aims at overthrowing something [by starting] at its very roots in order to create a new world, as in case of the French 1789 "revolution." The Japanese translate this as "*geming*" [*ka-kumei* 革命]. The two characters "*geming*" are no suitable translation [of the two English terms].⁸²

Liang continued by referring back to the traditional Chinese *geming* phrase and noted the inapplicability of likening changes in the ruling family's name with a true revolution. He defined "reform" as a gradual process of partial changes, while the abrupt overthrow of the whole system should be defined as "revolution" or rather as "transformation" (*biange* 變革):

Natural selection and transformation, why should they only have their place in politics? Under popular governance there is no affair or physical entity which is not subject to both.⁸³ If one translates the term in Japanese fashion, then in religion there is a religious revolution, within morality a moral revolution, in academia an academic revolution, in literature a literary revolution, within customs and habits a revolution of customs and habits, in production a production revolution. Accordingly, among the common vocabulary of China's students of new learning today, there is already a so-called classics revolution, a historiographical revolution, a literary revolution, a poetry revolution, a tune revolution, a prose revolution, a musical revolution, a character revolution, and all kinds of other terms. They do not have the slightest connection to the imperial court and still there is no other way then to call them revolutions. If one hears the two characters *geming* and is taken aback, this is because one does not

80 Cf. Tang Xiaobing 1996, chapter three.

81 Quoted in Tang Xiaobing 1996, 110.

82 Liang Qichao 1902, 1: Reform 者, 因其所固有而損益之以遷于善, 如英國國會一千八百三十二年之 Revolution 是也。日本人譯之曰改革, 曰革新。Revolution 者, 若轉輪然, 從根柢處掀翻之, 而別造一新世界, 如法國一千七百八十九年之 Revolution 是也, 日本人譯之曰革命。“革命”二字, 非確譯也。

83 This passage closely mirrors Liang's defense of reforms dating back to 1896, cf. the translation in Teng and Fairbank 1954, 154.

know that its real meaning is transformation and nothing else. Revolution may be feared, but does transformation also have to be feared? Alas, this is simply owed to not thinking and nothing else!⁸⁴

For Liang, the meaning of revolution was not confined to a narrow political sense but included a totalizing vision of change touching upon all aspects of life. By drawing a line of demarcation between revolution as the forceful overthrow of an existing order, associated with the term *geming*, and revolution as a fundamental transformation within all spheres of state and society, newly christened as *biange*, Liang hoped to dispel fears among the populace and scholarly elites that revolution would be analogous to bloody revolts and common suffering, which currently seemed to inhibit public desire for fundamental change. He strategically employed the Darwinist vocabulary of natural selection to provide the notion of constant transformation with a naturalized logic of incessant changes, thus attempting to shift the discussion into another realm of discourse, separated from meanings associated with the traditional concept of *geming*. No longer should revolutions be perceived of as merely a change of dynasties (*wangchao geming* 王朝革命) but rather as transformations by national citizens (*guomin zhi biange* 國民之變革).⁸⁵

Liang did not describe revolution and evolution as mutually exclusive pathways. Quite to the contrary, the forces of natural selection necessitated constant revolutions, understood as transformative adaptations to the changing political environment. These adaptations, however, also necessitated a change of customs and world outlook, as Liang forcefully argued in his long essay on “renewing the people” (*xinmin* 新民) published the same year. “Revolution” in the broader sense thus implied an attempt to educate the people, a vision of social engineering aimed at ridding the Chinese populace of their slave mentality. By educating a national-minded generation of new citizens, a Chinese *Risorgimento* seemed possible to him.

The above-mentioned essay, probably more than any other article, contributed to ascribing an all-encompassing vision of change within Chinese state and society. However, Liang’s attempts at redefining revolution as a comprehensive, yet bloodless overhaul of state and society, had the unexpected consequence of spreading rather than curbing *geming* discourses. The following year, a first wave of articles started addressing the notions of “family revolution” (*jiating geming* 家庭革命), “women’s revolution” (*funiu geming* 婦女革命) or “educational revolution” (*jiaoyu geming* 教育革命) that displayed an activist understanding of revolution as social transformation.⁸⁶

The article represents Liang Qichao’s last attempt to defend the concept of “revolution.” The year 1903 witnessed a remarkable change, both in terms of Liang’s personal views on how to modernize China and with regard to the concept of “revolution” within Chinese discourse. After an extended visit to the United States and comparing the consequences of reform and revolution in France and

84 Liang Qichao 1902, 4: 夫淘汰也，變革也，豈惟政治上為然耳，凡群治中一切萬事萬物莫不有焉。以日人之譯名言之，則宗教有宗教之革命，道德有道德之革命，學術有學術之革命，文學有文學之革命，風俗有風俗之革命，產業有產業之革命。即今日中國新學小生之恆言，固有所謂經學革命，史學革命，文界革命，詩界革命，曲界革命，小說界革命，音樂界革命，文字革命等種種名詞矣。若此者，豈當與朝廷政府有毫發之關係，而皆不得不謂之革命。聞“革命”二字則駭，而不知其本義實變革而已。革命可駭，則變革其亦可駭耶？嗚呼，其亦不思而已！

85 Liang Qichao 1902, 5.

86 Early articles include Jiating lixian zhe 1903, 13–22: 政治之革命，有國民之不自由而起；家庭之革命有個人之不自由而發。See also Tang Xuezheng 1904, 13–17.

Germany, Liang increasingly came to take a pessimistic view of the Chinese situation and favor reforms from above, in line with the Japanese modernization experiences. While Liang still advocated a terminological rectification by translating the concept of "revolution" with "transformation," he was acutely aware of the appeal of the violent definition of "revolution," indicating the overthrow of Manchu rule, especially among Chinese students in Japan. Liang perceived the sole fixation on racially grounded political revolution as a highly dangerous trend, since an anti-Manchu revolution did not address the root of China's current problems but merely provided an easy target for channeling the pervasive hatred and frustration about China's predicament.

Liang brilliantly highlighted the differences between these competing visions for a future China in his unfinished political novel *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記 (*The Future of New China*), which appeared serially in the first issues of his newly established Journal *Xin Xiaoshuo* 新小說 (*New Fiction*) between November 1902 and January 1903, along with his essay on defining *ge*.⁸⁷ The novel starts with a future national celebration of fifty years of reforms attended by the heads of the former imperialist powers, Sinologists, and representatives of China's by-now famous universities, examples of the successful attempt to renew the people through education. The story is structured through a narrator, who recounts to the audience a memorable discussion which had taken place sixty years earlier at the outset of the Chinese *Risorgimento*. The interlocutors were a certain Huang Keqiang, an exemplary reformer and later president of the new republic who had studied *Staatswissenschaften* in Berlin, and a Li Qubing, a hotheaded, yet amiable revolutionary and former student of history in Paris. They thus represented two different historical strands of state-building.

The disputants agreed on the necessity to forge the old empire into a modern nation-state, yet they disagreed about the role revolution should play in this process. While dynastic changes had frequently taken place in the past, they had been characterized by "replacing violence with violence" (*bao yi bao* 暴易暴). The revolutionary Li Qubing argued that the imminent revolution, inspired by the world historical trend towards democracy, would lead to a "replacement of violence through humanness" (*ren yi bao* 仁易暴).⁸⁸ Liang himself in a footnote to the novel stated that "people leaning towards idealism can set things into motion, but not accomplish results."⁸⁹ The fictional character Huang answered by way of historical analogy, claiming that while the French revolutionaries hoisted the "three flags" of liberty, equality, and fraternity, the result had been bloodshed and a reign of terror, ultimately followed by the rise of a military dictatorship. Li's counterargument did not dispute these facts but placed them in a larger picture of human evolution and the inevitability of chaotic circumstances in transitional periods. The discussion thus centered on the crucial issue of the importance of destruction and construction during a period of revolutionary change. While Huang voiced his uncertainty and preference for orderly procedures, Li approved of destruction and argued that destruction would continue irrespective of individual intentions:

In today's China, there will be destruction, regardless of whether one intends it or not. The difference rests on whether national traitors, a chaotic mob, or humane worthies carry out the destruction. If it is

87 The novel appeared in five installments. The authenticity of the last chapter has repeatedly been questioned. For an excellent discussion regarding the aspect of revolution in Liang's novel cf. Tang Xiaobing 1996, 121–137.

88 Liang Qichao 1902b, 58. The original double pagination is 37/39.

89 Liang Qichao 1902b, 59 (40/38).

humane worthies who engage in the work of destruction, there is a chance of carrying out destruction and construction simultaneously, or even of setting China back on track.⁹⁰

Li further quoted Benjamin Kidd (1858–1916), remarking that “the rule of a people’s evolution is to sacrifice their present benefits for future attainment.”⁹¹ Perceiving that a Chinese revolution would be in accord with world historical trends, Li denied the danger of foreign intervention. In the case that a “revolutionary army” (*geming jun* 革命軍)⁹² would rise up, foreign powers would prefer to deal with a civilized government rather than Manchus, whom he criticized in stark terms. Huang argued less optimistically, stating that the only thing the foreign powers cared about were their own political and economic interests. An intervention, therefore, was to be expected. In this case, Li answered, the Chinese people would stand up and fight, and even if 90% of the Chinese were extinguished, the Chinese population would still be greater than that of France.⁹³

Among the few points that both could agree on was the fact that the Chinese populace was at present insufficiently educated to grasp the meaning of concepts such as “popular sovereignty” and lacked a basic national consciousness. These preconditions, however, were crucial for the success of a revolution, for it would not be sufficient to rely on a few heroic actors. For Huang, the only path to success was by means of citizen education (*quomin jiaoyu* 國民教育). Trying to rouse the people at this point in time for a national revolution would thus be in vain:

My good brother, I tell you truthfully, the present popular morality, knowledge, and strength prohibits speaking to them about revolution; even if you spoke about it daily, and major changes would occur, this revolution would still not be feasible. Now, if the preconditions of popular morality, knowledge, and strength allowing for discussions about revolution would be given at a time when revolution seems feasible, why would it be necessary to engage in revolution? Brother, please reconsider this.⁹⁴

While Li agreed with the present lamentable state of popular consciousness, his argument displayed strong activism:

90 Ibid, 76 (55/57): 今日的中國，破壞也破壞，不破壞也要破壞，所分別的，隻看是民賊去破壞他，還是亂民去破壞他，還是仁人君子去破壞他。若是仁人君子去做那破壞事業，倒還可以一面破壞，一面建設，或者把中國回轉得過來。

91 Ibid, 78 (57/59): 人群进化之理，是要牺牲现在的利益以为将来。The original reference reads slightly different: “Throughout the whole period of development hitherto the conditions of progress have necessarily been incompatible with the welfare of a large proportion of the individuals comprising any species. Yet it is evident that to these, if they had been able to think and to have any voice in the matter, their own welfare must have appeared immeasurably more important than the future of the species, or than any progress, however great, that their kind might make which thus demanded that they should be sacrificed to it.” Cf. Kidd 1907 [1894], 66–67. At least parts of Kidd’s book had been translated into Chinese by missionary Timothy Richard (1845–1919) and his secretary in 1899, cf. Bernal 1976, 27.

92 Liang 1902b, 84 (64/62).

93 Liang 1902b, 86–87 (66/64 until 65/67). Mao Zedong in 1957 would voice a very similar argument regarding the possible consequences of atomic warfare, see Mao Zedong 1957, 636.

94 Liang Qichao 1902b, 94 (74/72): 好兄弟，我實告訴你罷，現在的民德、民智、民力、不但不可以和他講革命，就是你天天講，天天跳，這革命也是萬不能做到的。若到那民德、民智、民力可以講革命，可以做革命的時候，這又何必更要革命呢？兄弟，你再想想。

While it is impossible to achieve revolution today, it is still mandatory to speak about revolution. My brother, if you look at the present constitutional monarchies: Is there a country which has not adopted this system after heated debates about revolution? [...]. Irrespective of whether our future aim is to establish a republic or a constitution, revolutionary discussions and revolutionary thought cannot be negated in the present state of affairs.⁹⁵

The novel raised the most basic questions associated with the concept of "revolution" in persuasive dialogue. While Liang's own preference for social transformation and incremental political change was obvious given the success of his future vision of a strong and prosperous China, he nevertheless gave full credence to the appropriateness of debating radical changes. The debate revealed the allure of the utopian elements associated with "revolution," regardless of their political impracticality. However, it further displayed a strong skepticism toward mere emotional agitation instead of strenuous reasoning about the possible consequences of a revolutionary movement on future development.

With Liang Qichao, *geming* assumed the full range of meanings associated with the Western concept of "revolution." It became a "collective singular,"⁹⁶ which accommodated varying interpretative strands ranging from violent upheaval to social transformation. Despite his attempt to shift the emphasis from destructive notions of rebellion, the emotional allure of the concept proved to be stronger than academic ratiocination, especially among the growing number of Chinese students in Japan. It is probably no coincidence that only a few months after Liang published his novel, a short pamphlet written by a Chinese student in Japan adopted the title "Revolutionary Army," a phrase which the fictional disputers had employed, to present another vision of future China. In a style that did away with the courteous exchange of arguments characteristic of Liang's novel, rampant emotionism and racist nationalism came to dominate public discourses.

Revolution, Race, and Nation

The year 1903 is of particular importance for the development of the concept of "revolution." As Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng have demonstrated by way of relying on quantitative data analysis (cf. Table 1),⁹⁷ the phrase *geming* experienced an enormous upsurge that year. While prior to 1901, the few articles that mentioned the term "revolution" at all mostly referred to the historical example of France, after the intervention of the foreign powers in 1900/01 and the flight of the court calls for political revolution grew stronger, albeit in a speculative manner. By 1903, a different picture emerges: "Revolution" achieved central status as an all-encompassing concept of change imbued with notions of historical necessity. For the first time, the concept was used in a self-referential manner by revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen, Zhang Binglin, and Zou Rong to legitimate the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty, culminating in the spectacular "Subao case," during which Zhang and Zou were sentenced to

95 Liang Qichao 1902b, 95 (73/75): 今日做革命成者不能，講革命也是必要的。哥哥你看現世各國君主立憲政體，那一國不是當革命議論最猖狂的時候才能成就起來？[...]。我們將來的目的不管他在共和還是在立憲，總之革命議論、革命思想在現時國中是萬不可少的。

96 Koselleck et al. 1984, 734.

97 This chart is based on Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng 2008, 374. Their calculations are derived from the currently most comprehensive database on the period, "Zhongguo jin xiandai sixiang shi zhuanke shujuku" 中國近現代思想史專業數據庫 (1830–1930), cf. www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/rccec/database/.

prison sentences for agitating against the Manchus. “Revolution” was no longer a mere academic exercise but became a heavily contested political label. The term “revolutionary” was turned into an emphatic self-categorization, at least among radical Chinese youth in Japan.

While the overall number of references to “revolution” increased threefold in 1903, the spectrum of phenomena described considerably broadened to include most spheres sketched out by Liang Qichao in his essay on defining *ge*. From historical and contemporaneous political examples to references to an emerging Chinese revolutionary party and calls for social transformations, the concept came to be associated with an unstoppable evolutionary process; for some, it became the quintessential expression of modernization. The most remarkable change in 1903, however, was the rise of the concept of “racial revolution” (*zhongzu geming* 種族革命), a term that experienced a tenfold increase alongside growing calls for political revolution.

Type of “revolution” \ Year	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911
Change of dynastic names (易姓革命)		4	2	12	1	5	15	9	140	50	29					15
Tang Wu Revolution (湯武革命)	3		1	2		2	5	4	3				2		1	3
French Revolution (法國革命)		5	20	31	21	29	102	231	161	58	83	104	38	9	42	20
Racial revolution (排滿/種族革命)			1	4		14	19	226	27	15	338	122	19		6	5
Political revolution (政治革命)			2	15	7	88	70	229	88	41	714	106	35	4	7	5
Economic revolution (經濟革命)				1	4	1	2	19	4		27	19		1	10	4
Social revolution (社會革命)				2		2		1	1	12	350	71	3	1	3	
Anarchic revolution (無政府革命)										2	23	258	259			2
[Chinese] Revolutionary Party ([中國]革命黨)			2	2	2	6	8	47	5	10	532	371	183	50	203	93
Russian Revolution (俄國革命)						1		74	4	61	49	15	5	3	20	
Revolutionary progress (革命進化)				2	3		10	31	2		5	50				
Others	5	12	8	71	41	67	228	527	139	137	725	486	141	39	169	54
Total	8	21	36	142	79	215	459	1398	574	386	2875	1602	715	107	463	199

Table 1: References to “*geming*” in Chinese public discourse (1896–1911)

Anti-Manchism had been a salient feature of discourses of revenge and trauma going back to the early days of the Qing conquest and especially during the Taiping movement. Yet, after the suppression of the reform movement of 1898, the killing of prominent reformers such as Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–1898), and the obvious weakness of the court in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion, voices that decried the Manchu rulers as the reason for China’s weakness gained currency. Zhang Binglin, who continued to warn of the dangers of revolution in 1897, had emerged as the sharpest critic of the court and wrote

a letter in response to Kang Youwei's negation of revolution. The letter did not reach Kang, who at the time was traveling extensively. Zhang therefore had it published as a pamphlet in Shanghai in June 1903. Parts of the letter were also published in the Shanghai newspaper *Subao* 蘇報 the same month and incited national attention. The delicately worded open letter presented a spirited defense of revolution and nationalism, which Zhang, unlike the fictive Li Qubing, rooted not only in Western influences but also in latently existing trends since Chinese antiquity. He sharply attacked Kang as a careerist, waiting to be bestowed with offices by the "clown Zaitian,"⁹⁸ as he addressed the Guangxu emperor with his tabooed personal name.

Zhang presented four major arguments to counter Kang's criticism of revolutionary action. First, he argued that bloodshed was inevitable. Manchu-Han equality, as advocated by Kang, should be considered a mere chimera. According to Zhang, an "animal flock" (*qunshou* 羣獸) of some five million "Eastern barbarians" (*Dong Hu* 東胡) continued to suppress over 400 million Han Chinese. The Han had become slaves of the foreign invaders, and the prospect of colonial subjugation should be perceived as reality rather than as a future threat. Violence would be necessary, because the Manchu dynasty would not cede power without conflict and even constitutional changes would not be implemented without resistance. Zhang denied that a change within the ranks of Manchu leadership would lead to substantial improvement. Violent revolution was therefore unavoidable.

Second, Zhang claimed that revolution was easier to achieve than the constitutional governance presented by Kang. This is because the latter relied on the capabilities of an able monarch, while Zaitian had proven to be the "most incapable" ruler under heaven.⁹⁹ He explicitly tied the ability to change present circumstances to human agency: "In short, to bring order out of chaos, one does not have to rely on the existence of a 'Heavenly Mandate'. It is dependent on human strength."¹⁰⁰ The article immediately referred to the loss of the semantic plausibility of the concept of the "Heavenly Mandate." With regard to agency, Zhang expressed his firm belief that the Chinese race had brought forth the emperors Yao and Shun in the past. Why shouldn't it be capable of producing a number of Chinese Washingtons or Napoleons to lead the future revolution? The narrow focus on heroes, however, obscured the fact that not heavenly wisdom but political circumstances and evolutionary pressures forged revolutionaries, as Zhang pointed out in his third argument. Instead of waiting for old thoughts and customs to disappear, the establishment of new thinking should be seen as the consequence rather than as the precondition of revolution:

With regard to Chinese popular sentiment, Kang Youwei believes that the universal principles are not sufficiently elucidated and old customs still abound; as a consequence, after the revolution violent striving and confusion regarding its aims would necessarily appear. How could political reforms, the salvation of the people, and a reorganization of domestic politics be conducted under such circumstances? [...]. I reply to this: The wisdom of popular sentiment derives from revolutionary struggle. [...]. Therefore, if universal principles are insufficiently elucidated, they should be elucidated through a revolution; if the old habits still abound, they should be discarded through revolution. Revolution is not a strong drug like monkshood or rhubarb. In reality, it is a good medicine including both reinforcing and reducing methods.¹⁰¹

98 Zhang Binglin 1903, 177.

99 Zhang Binglin 1903, 180.

100 Zhang Binglin 1903, 179: 要之，撥亂反正，不在天命之有無，而在人力之難易。

The last argument seems startling at first glance: Zhang Binglin rather surprisingly used Ming dynasty rebel leader Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606–1644) to elucidate his argument. Li had started his rebellion for reasons of fame and power, but according to Zhang had come to understand that providing relief for the starving populace was the major task of his age.¹⁰² Similarly, Zhang argued, in the present age the drive towards uniting the people and establishing a republic through revolutionary measures had become an evolutionary necessity. Revolution thus appeared as a continuous process towards a certain end, which Zhang did not easily equate with Western-type modernity. The foreign powers, finally, would play a constructive role in this process. In the current situation, there was “no way not to rely on them”¹⁰³ to conduct a revolution. However, the revolutionaries should remain wary of their own dominance in order retain control of the situation.

Zhang’s vision of revolution as a long-term procedural change marks a threshold of the modern conceptions of “revolution.” While still engaging in classicist discourses, he was the first among the major intellectuals of his age to infuse the discourse with radical nationalism and the public denigration of the Manchus. The merging of the concept of “revolution” with the older discourses of anti-Manchu sentiment had strong emotional appeal. It turned out to be the most effective choice for imparting the concept of “revolution” with additional persuasive power. This becomes obvious in view of an example of a pamphlet that was printed alongside Zhang’s remarks, written by a 18-year old student named Zou Rong under the title of “Revolutionary Army” (*Geming jun* 革命軍). It had first appeared in booklet form a month earlier in May 1903 and would become the most widely read contemporaneous tract on revolution.¹⁰⁴

While Zhang’s letter might still be interpreted as part of a fairly esoteric scholarly discourse, Zou Rong’s pamphlet was clearly directed at a wider readership with no pretense to classical erudition. It was an emotional and rousing call, which caught on in public discourse as a result of two rhetorical shifts. First, it situated the concept of “revolution” firmly within the emerging discourses of a Han-Chinese identity and xenophobic nationalism. Furthermore, the tract combined traditional discourses of righteousness with the notion of civil rights, thereby linking past oppression with a vision of future salvation. Zhang Binglin in his foreword to the tract described the directness and simplicity of the language as one of its greatest strengths, because revolution depended on popular support.¹⁰⁵ The emotional language would allow “butchers and wine sellers, peddlers and hucksters”¹⁰⁶ to grasp the situation much faster than complex treatises. He furthermore commented on the novel meaning of the concept of “revolution” as employed by Zou Rong:

101 Zhang Binglin 1903, 180: 長素以爲中國今日之人心，公理未明，舊俗俱在，革命以後，必將日尋幹戈，偷生不暇，何能變法救民，整頓內治！[...]。則應之曰：人心之智慧，自競爭而後發生。[...]。然則公理之未明，即以革命明之；舊俗之俱在，即以革命去之。革命非天雄大黃之猛劑，而實補瀉兼備之良藥矣。

102 Zhang Binglin 1903, 180.

103 Zhang Binglin 1903, 181.

104 Some twenty editions have been distinguished and the total print run is estimated to have exceeded one million copies, cf. Zarrow 2012, 155.

105 Lust 1968, 52: “Alas, the present generation is stupid and does not speak its mind. It concentrates its efforts on social satire. Since it will not display anger on its face, or startle people with a thunderous voice, how many can be brought over? When, at another time, an army again hoists the flag of revolt, it must surely fail if it lacks the backing of public opinion. Tsou wrote this book to stir up their consciences and indignation by his laments.”

106 Lust 1968, 52.

Now, I have heard that when people of the same race replace others, this is called revolution. When an alien race seizes their land, this is known as destruction. When a government is changed by people of the same race, this is known as revolution. When an alien race is expelled, this is known as restoration. Because China was destroyed by the rebel barbarians, what is planned is restoration and not revolution. Why did Tsou make use of this term? Surely it was because his intention was not merely to expel an alien race: politics, education, learning, customs and abilities (for office) ought to be revolutionized. Hence he extended considerably the sense of the word *revolution* [emphasis in original translation].¹⁰⁷

Although Zhang attributed the widening of the spectrum of "revolution" solely to Zou Rong, the indebtedness to the writings of Liang Qichao is clear. But Liang was not the only source of Zou's writings. In his definition of "revolution," he also included direct quotes from Ou Jujia's 1899 hymn on revolution, which at the time had failed to catch on in intellectual debates. Zou, however, freely combined all previous definitions into an all-encompassing definition:

Revolution is the universal principle of evolution. Revolution is a universal principle of the world. Revolution is the essence of the struggle for survival or destruction in a time of transition. Revolution submits to heaven and responds to men's needs. Revolution rejects what is corrupt and keeps the good. Revolution is the advance from barbarism to civilization. Revolution turns slaves into masters.¹⁰⁸

Zou referred to previous changes of dynastic rule as "barbaric" (*yeman* 野蠻) revolutions, while contending that the attempted overthrow of the Manchus, which was informed by Western theories of civil rights, should be interpreted as a "civilized" (*wenming* 文明) revolution.¹⁰⁹ While barbaric revolutions solely engaged in destruction and resulted in anarchy and suffering, civilized revolutions engaged both in destruction and construction, achieving freedom, equality, and independence, thus increasing the happiness of the citizens.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Zou differentiated between an "everyday" meaning of revolution, signifying the constant adaptations of all living things through the mechanisms of evolution as described by Liang Qichao, and an "extraordinary" meaning of the concept. The latter consisted of a highly emotionalized rousing call to inspire his "fellow countrymen" to engage in a radical turnover of the present state that sacrificed the individual for the benefit of the common people: "Who is for revolution? Out of it must come fire and blood. Who is for revolution? Out of it must come freedom and equality. [...]. Revolution! Revolution! Achieve it, then you may live; fail in it, then you may die! Let there be no holding back. There is no place for neutrality or hesitation. This is the moment!"¹¹¹

The tract dwelt at length on the devastations wrought upon the Chinese nation by the "Manchu scoundrels."¹¹² It cited cruel examples of social inequality as well historical instances of racial oppression to

107 The translation has been slightly adapted from Lust 1968, 52: 抑吾聞之，同族相代，謂之革命；異族攘竊，謂之滅亡；改制同族，謂之革命；驅除異族，謂之光復。今中國既已滅亡於逆胡，所當謀者光復也，非革命雲爾。容之署斯名，何哉？諒以其所規劃，不僅驅除異族而已。雖政教、學術、禮俗、材性，猶有當革命者焉，故大言之曰革命也。

108 Lust 1968, 58: 革命者，天演之公例也；革命者，世界之公理也；革命者，爭存爭亡過渡時代之要義也；革命者，順乎天而應乎人者也；革命者，去腐敗而存良善者也；革命者，由野蠻而進文明者也。

109 Lust 1968, 60.

110 Lust 1968, 99.

111 Lust 1968, 59–60.

112 Lust 1968, 65.

rouse the public passion of the doubly enslaved “sacred Han race,”¹¹³ who nevertheless seemed to enjoy being slaves. The first aim of the revolution would therefore be to discard its slave mentality. Otherwise, China would continue to be a passive object rather than an active subject of the evolutionary struggle for existence. Besides the dimension of fervent nationalism, the pamphlet also argued for equality and civil rights. Zou defined Han nationalism, freedom and equality, and a nascent concept of legality as the main pillars of the Chinese revolution.¹¹⁴ After the revolution, a new state would be built based on the concepts of civil rights and popular sovereignty. The American constitution was to provide the model. Should the state, however, infringe on the established principles of equality and freedom, the citizens should only again engage in revolution as a last resort and rather attempt to strengthen their rights through other means.¹¹⁵ Otherwise, it would be impossible to establish lasting governance.

The combination of the discourses of national liberation, civil rights, and fierce anti-Manchu agitation, which located the reasons for the current predicament solely in Manchu suppression, turned out to be extremely effective for merging together perceptions of a foreign threat and the government’s political weakness. The book and especially the trial against its author, which turned him into a martyr, and Zhang Binglin, contributed more than any other instance to providing the concept of “revolution” with a sense of destiny and future salvation. To engage in revolution became a question of attitude rather than semantic sophistication. A few contemporaries cautioned about the dangers of misreading the book as primarily advocating xenophobic hatred. In a review of the book, Zhang Shizhao 章士釗 (1881–1973), editor-in-chief of the *Subao*, clearly stated that nationalism was the main objective of the tract and that anti-Manchism was merely to be seen as an instrument to rouse the masses:

Therefore, the opinion of expelling the Manchus is truly suited as the hidden power of revolution. It is the road present-day revolutionaries must take. [...]. Splendid! For Mr. Zou’s “Revolutionary Army,” nationalism serves as the fundament and anti-Manchu sentiment serves as a means. By pulling out past events and establishing universal principles, [the tract] proceeds with a sharp pen and achieves [its aims] with blunt and simple words. Even among fools and cowards, there is no one who, after having read or heard of its words, does not become agitated and with strumming heart and swelled chest is not transformed into a condition of wanting to draw his sword to chop up the earth or wish to throw himself into the ocean. Alas! This work should truly become the first textbook of modern-day citizen education.¹¹⁶

The success of merging the discourses of nationalism and xenophobia was not only mirrored in the massive reprint of the tract and later accounts of emotional reading experiences; it can also be seen in the fact that in its wake the concept of “revolution” gained unprecedented importance in public discourse. Only after the publication of the “Revolutionary Army,” for example, did Sun Yat-sen come to bolster his revolutionary agitation through written accounts, which expressed his views on the concept of “revolution.” In a letter to supporters written in December 1903, he advised changing the epithet

113 Lust 1968, 122.

114 Lust 1968, 101–102. Zou in this reference to legality immediately refers to a “concept”: 有法律亡觀念故耳。

115 Lust 1968, 124.

116 Quoted in Zhang Zhan and Wang Renzi 1960, vol. 1, 685: 是以排滿之見，實足為革命之潛勢力，而今日革命者所必不能不經之一途也。[...]。卓哉！鄒氏之革命軍也，以國民主義為幹，以仇滿為用，掃蕩往事，根極公理，驅以犀利之筆，達以淺直之詞。雖頑懦之夫，目睹其字，耳聞其語，則罔不面赤耳熱，心跳肺張，作拔劍砍地、奮身入海之狀。嗚呼！此誠今日國民教育之第一教科書也。The article was published in the *Subao* on June 9, 1903.

"revolutionary party" to "revolutionary army" in commemoration of Zou's book.¹¹⁷ Other prominent thinkers such as Liang Qichao succumbed to the impact of the tract's success by discarding the formerly advocated use of alternative concepts such as "transformation."

By the end of 1903, "revolution" had acquired unprecedented importance in Chinese discourse. It had come to include classical connotations of violent upheaval and modern notions of civil rights and popular sovereignty. "Revolution" was defined as a dominant historical trend, indicating evolutionary changes on the micro and macro levels, which necessitated firm political action in order for China to not lose out in the struggle of the fittest. The concept served to combine the discourses of nation and racist agitation, relying on rhetoric of national shame, exploitation, and enslavement. "Revolution" became an emphatic and thoroughly politicized term, which could be invoked to bolster competing views. Unlike the previous denomination of "rebels," the phrase "revolutionary" now carried with it a sense of holy mission and national salvation through which China would regain its sovereignty. In the following years, revolutionary claims became institutionalized through the founding of the *Tongmenghui* 同盟會 in 1905. However, the concept underwent further differentiation, as the oversimplifications of the xenophobic rhetoric gave way to increasingly complex debates about the necessary changes within the state and society.

From Political to Social Revolution

The quantitative survey conducted by Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng reveals a second peak of revolutionary rhetoric in the year 1906, clustered around the terms "political revolution," "racial revolution," but also "revolutionary party," and "social revolution" (*shehui geming* 社會革命), a term that had previously played a negligible role. In 1907, the phrase "anarchist revolution" (*wu zhengfu geming* 無政府革命) would furthermore rise to prominence for a brief period, before the rhetoric of revolution took a marked downturn prior to the actual Xinhai Revolution, not least because the major journals of both reformers and revolutionaries in Japan were closed down. The statistical peak is firmly related to the famous debate on China's future path between Liang Qichao and a number of young *Tongmenghui* radicals, who published in the newly founded party organ *Minbao* 民報.

Differences between the advocates of reform and revolution had been sharpened through a series of written attacks, revealing the increasing politicization of the concept of revolution. Already in December 1903, Sun Yat-sen, in what amounts to be his first written explication of the concept of "revolution," sharply attacked Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao for pretending to speak in the name of revolution, while advocating a continuation of Manchu rule. He referred to Liang as a "public enemy" (*gongdi* 公敵) and "Han hater" (*Han chou* 漢仇)¹¹⁸ who had failed to sever his ties with the royalist Kang Youwei, clearly harking back to their failed collaboration in 1899. He summarized his views in stark terms:

Revolution and protecting the emperor signify two separate paths, just as black and white cannot be mixed or East and West cannot trade places. The mind of revolutionaries is set on expelling the Manchus and rejuvenating the Han. The mind of those protecting the emperor is set on aiding the Manchus and serving the Qing. [...] Generally speaking, the line of demarcation has to be strictly drawn in order to not

117 Sun Yat-sen 2011, 228.

118 Sun Yat-sen 2011, 231.

lead to confusion. Our revolution has nothing to do with protecting the emperor. Why should the protection of the emperor of those [like Kang and Liang] be wrongly referred to as revolution?¹¹⁹

The defining criterion for being a “revolutionary” accordingly was not a certain preference for a particular future political order but anti-Manchism. Those in favor of constitutional reforms were said to have failed to grasp this fundamental distinction and could by no means be counted among the revolutionaries. Revolution allowed for no compromise. One could either support or oppose it, but there was no room for hesitation or diverging viewpoints.

Liang Qichao came to perceive the discursive trend toward xenophobic nationalism with increasing skepticism and anxiety. In 1903, he had already advocated the notion of “broad nationalism”¹²⁰ to avoid the blurring of state building with anti-Manchu sentiments. He furthermore tried to locate the importance of the revolution within the larger framework of past rebellions and revolutions in Chinese history. In 1904, he published a long article entitled “Analysis of Revolutions in Chinese History,” in which he referred to the increasing confusion surrounding the concept of “revolution”:

The past few years in China may be referred to as period of debates. Chinese debates in recent years have become increasingly complicated, and the discussions about revolution can serve as the most prominent example. All speakers have to ground their arguments in history; practitioners have even greater interest in mirroring causes and effects in history. [...]. The meaning of revolution can be divided into broad and narrow definitions. The broadest definition refers to all the great changes that every material or immaterial object within society experiences over time. The second broadest definition denotes all the exceptional political movements that aim to bring about a new period, which completely differs from the former one, irrespective of whether they attempt this with peaceful or violent means. The narrow definition especially refers to those who with military means aim at overthrowing the central government. In China during the past thousands of years, there have only been revolutions in the narrow sense of the word. Those who advocate a sweeping revolution are solely enchanted by the narrow meaning of revolution.¹²¹

Liang attempted to undertake a systemic evaluation: He distinguished a set of seven criteria to discriminate between Western models of revolution and examples drawn from Chinese history. First, private revolutions (*siren geming* 私人革命) as opposed to group revolutions (*tuanti geming* 團體革命) had accordingly characterized previous revolutions in China. Second, these were incited by personal ambition rather than being a reaction to oppression. Third, the driving forces behind the revolutions had either been the upper or lower strata of society (with the exception of the Gonghe Regency in the 9th century BCE), unlike their Western counterparts, where successful revolutions had commonly been

119 Sun Yat-sen 2011, 232: 革命、保皇二事決分兩途，如黑白之不能混淆，如東西之不能易位。革命者志在撲滿而興漢，保皇者志在扶滿而臣清。[...]。總之，劃清界限，不使混淆，吾人革命，不說保皇，彼革保皇，何必偏稱革命？The war of words was to continue in Honolulu’s Chinese language papers during the following weeks, resulting in a further hardening of viewpoints, see Sun Yat-sen 2011, 233–238.

120 Tang Xiaobing 1996, 127.

121 Liang Qichao 1904, 115: 近數年來之中國，可謂言論時代也已矣。近數年來中國言論，復離不可殫數，若革命論者，可謂其最有力之一種也已矣。凡發言者不可不求其論據於歷史，凡實行者愈不可不鑒其因果於歷史[...] 革命之義有廣狹：其最廣義，則社會上一切無形有形之事物所生之大變動皆是也；其次廣義，則政治上之異動與前此劃然成一新時代者，無論以平和得之 以鐵血得之皆是也；其狹義，則專以兵力向於中央政府者是也。吾中國數千年來，惟有狹義的革命，今之持極端革命論者，惟心醉狹義的革命。故吾今所研究，亦在此狹義的革命。 For a slightly different formulation by Qin Lishan 秦力山 (1877–1906) cf. Li W eiwu 2012, 107–109.

enacted by the middle strata (*zhongdeng shehui* 中等社會). Liang conceded that it was difficult to draw a clear line between lower and middle classes,¹²² but he also referred to moral qualities and urban environments rather than income as criteria. The difference rested with the aims of revolution. While the upper and lower strata vied for personal gain, the middle strata usually had been forced to carry out a revolution due to a degeneration of their livelihoods. They thus had no interest in prolonged struggle, which Liang defined as another feature of Chinese revolutions.

Revolutions in China had, fourth, been usually characterized by a multitude of competitors, resulting, fifth, in extended periods of confusion and violence. Liang explicitly stated that while in Western countries different parties had fought for a common cause and been able to engage in compromise, the relation between Chinese revolutionaries had, sixth, been characterized by enmity, an immediate reference to Sun's provocations. Finally, seventh, the role of foreign powers in present China differed from other historical examples, since foreign invasions had usually been a consequence rather than a precondition of revolution.

Liang expressed grave doubts about the current prospects of revolution in China, since it would only be successful if the ideals and resulting revolutionary practices met these seven criteria. However, neither the self-proclaimed leaders of the movement, whom he accused of indulging in fame and sensual pleasures, nor their followers differed significantly from their Chinese predecessors.¹²³ There is a strong sense of desperation in the concluding lines of the article, as well as a feeling that he has lost his audience to the radicals. The article is furthermore noteworthy for its attempt to systematize the course of revolution and evaluate current experiences against the backdrop of history. Liang's observation that history in the sense of a national history served as the most important source of ideological ammunition was well taken and continued to find favor throughout the century.

Liang's continuing criticism of revolutionary utopianism and his stinging analysis of the theoretical deficits of the movement presented a serious challenge for the revolutionaries, who had gathered in Tokyo in August 1905 to form the *Tongmenghui*, an organization which gained national prominence and followed a wave of new revolutionary cells in China and the Chinese diaspora.¹²⁴ Between 1905 and 1907, a major debate developed between Liang and the radicals, during which the concept of "revolution" was further refined and contested.¹²⁵ In the first two issues of the *Minbao*, two installments written by Chen Tianhua 陳天華 (1875–1905) appeared under the title "A Treatise of China's Revolutionary History," which took up Liang's historical arguments but ascribed the failure of past revolutions to different reasons. Chen sharply attacked Liang for misrepresenting Chinese and Western history through oversimplification. The idealization of the Western revolution overlooked the fact that in Western history revolutions quite often had been characterized by a lack of mass involvement and by aristocratic leadership. The fault line should not be drawn between China and the West, but between the aims of the

122 Liang Qichao 1904, 120: 或疑中等與下等之界線頗難划, 同為無所憑借, 則中與下等耳, 于何辨之? 曰: 起事者為善良之市民, 命之曰中等; 其為盜賊, 命之曰下等。

123 Liang Qichao 1904, 129.

124 On the background of the *Tongmenhui* cf. Lee 1970.

125 The debate centered on the respective advantages of constitutional vs. revolutionary transformation, the role of the state, and economic policies, issues closely linked with the concept of "revolution". For in-depth discussions of the arguments cf. Scalapino and Yu 1985, chapters three and four; Li Yu-ning 1971, chapter three; and Bernal 1976, chapter seven.

revolution. Chen proposed to analyze revolution as a phenomenon by distinguishing “hero revolutions” (*yíngxióng gémìng* 英雄革命) from “citizen revolutions” (*guómín gémìng* 國民革命).

There are citizen revolutions and there are hero revolutions. If the revolution emanates from the citizens, then liberty will be declared after the revolution and a republic will be established. If the situation is compared with the situation before the revolution, happiness increases indefinitely, as in case of the revolutions in present-day Western countries. If the revolution emanates from heroes, dictatorship will be replaced by dictatorship [...] or warlords will contest with each other, battling endlessly and locked in stalemate for tens or hundreds of years, with the result being similar to the beginning. The gain in happiness will not make up for enduring the previous pains, just as it was the case in China’s past revolutions.¹²⁶

Liang Qichao’s vision of revolution was still been strongly influenced by noble-minded leaders, which he equated especially with Oliver Cromwell and George Washington. Revolutions of the lower classes, on the other hand, were no different in his opinion from past peasant rebellions such as the Yellow Turban Rebellion, characterized by aimless plundering and the destruction of the established order. Chen, on the other hand, was strongly in favor of mass involvement and claimed that the masses represented evolutionary change.¹²⁷ However, he also hinted at the importance of revolutionary leaders. A citizen revolution would only be successful if the leaders disregarded their personal reputations (*gōngmíng xīn* 功名心) and acted out of responsibility for the people (*zèrén xīng* 責任心).

The latter views would have accorded rather well with Liang’s perception, if not for reasons of political background the standpoints had been artificially hardened. Chen’s arguments furthermore were never fully fleshed out, since he committed suicide in the Tokyo Bay in December 1905 to protest against the increasing restrictions imposed on Chinese students in Japan before the second installment of his article had even appeared. And while Sun Yatsen took up the distinction between hero and citizen revolutions in later articles,¹²⁸ he did not provide further arguments and the debate on the historical dimension of the Chinese revolution therefore remained in limbo. The future of revolution rather than its historical manifestations thus became the main battleground for the ensuing debate.

In 1904, Liang Qichao bemoaned the radical students and their leaders’ narrow understanding of revolution as an overthrow of the central government. Only two years later, the situation fundamentally changed, mainly through the impact of socialist discourses.¹²⁹ The revolutionaries’ former narrow focus on xenophobic nationalism (which still continued to be debated)¹³⁰ and the occasional remarks on citizen rights had, by 1905, been supplemented by calls for a redistribution of wealth, popularized through the concept of the “people’s livelihood” (*mínshēng* 民生). The concept figured prominently in Sun’s editorial in the first *Minbao* issue, alongside the concepts of “nationalism” (*min-*

126 Quoted in Zhang Zhan and Wang Renzi 1960, vol. 1, 5: 有國民之革命，有英雄之革命。革命而出於國民也，革命之後，宣布自由，設立共和，其幸福較之未革命之前，增進萬倍，如近日泰西諸國之革命是也。革命而出於英雄也，一專制去而一專制來。[...]。或則群雄角逐，戰爭無已，相持至數百年，而後始底於一，幸福之得不足以償其痛苦，中國歷來之革命是也。

127 Quoted in Zhang Zhan and Wang Renzi 1960, vol. 1, 7: 夫人群，進化者也。

128 Quoted in Li Weiwu 2011, 19.

129 On the introduction of the concept of “socialism” in China, cf. Bernal 1976 and Li 1971.

130 For an overview of the debates, cf. Gasster 1969, chapters three and four.

zu 民族) and "democracy" (*minzhu* 民主).¹³¹ While the latter concepts had been subjected to prolonged discussions before, Sun dwelt at length on the necessity of changing the people's livelihood. While in Europe social problems had become grave questions, China had not yet been affected by the growing inequalities produced by industrialization and, in Sun's opinion, it could thus easily avoid the problem. Despite the power of European countries, their people were suffering and "social revolution"¹³² loomed on the horizon. If China failed to draw its lessons from the European example, a "second revolution" would be inevitable. China should therefore carry out political and social revolution at the same time and, as a result of this pioneering act, avoid later difficulties.¹³³

Sun did not offer specific details about how social revolution should be defined and conducted. This particular task was taken on by Zhu Zhixin 朱執信 (1885–1920), after Liang Qichao had sharply attacked Sun's concept in a series of articles as being overtly idealist and not applicable to the Chinese situation. Under the title of "Discussion of Enlightened Despotism," published in April 1906, Liang stated that the concept of "social revolution" was primarily employed by the revolutionaries as a means of agitation among the lower classes, with promises to rob the rich and divide the bounty among the poor.¹³⁴ Liang claimed that the establishment of socialism in China would take at least another millennium and that the planned nationalization of all plots would amount to state-led land grabbing. Liang furthermore quoted from memory a discussion with Sun back in 1899, when Sun was supposed to have justified the simultaneous enactment of political, racial, and social revolution in reference to the chaotic situation after the revolution, when, he purportedly remarked, "about half, or at least a quarter, of our 400 million people will be lost. The catastrophe will level things, and 70 to 80 percent of the land will not be owned. [...] That is why I advocate great bloodshed: it is the only way to reach our goal."¹³⁵ Liang insinuated that savagery rather than European socialism underpinned Sun's understanding of social revolution. The result would be just another example of China's past revolutions: a mobilization of the lowest strata of society, resulting in the destruction and weakening of the nation.

Zhu Zhixin countered Liang's accusations by claiming that Sun had only expressed the observation that during a tumultuous period property would matter less to most people and that social revolution would therefore be easier to implement. Zhu offered the following definition of social revolution:

Social revolution in the widest sense refers to cases in which all social organizations abruptly bring about major changes. Therefore, political revolution may be called one type of social revolution. What [I] will talk about today are only revolutions within socio-economic organizations, which might be called social revolutions in the narrow sense of the term.¹³⁶

131 Cf. Sun Yat-sen 2011, 288. Martin Bernal argues convincingly that Sun employed the classical term *minsheng* mainly for euphonic reasons in order to mirror Abraham Lincoln's "of the people, by the people, for the people," cf. Bernal 1976, 68.

132 Sun Yat-sen 2011, 289.

133 Sun Yat-sen 2011, 289.

134 Quoted in Zhang Zhan and Wang Renzi 1960, vol. 2, 172.

135 Quoted in Bernal 1976, 138.

136 Quoted in Zhang Zhan and Wang Renzi 1960, vol. 2, 433: 社會革命者，於廣義則凡社會上組織為急激生大變動皆可言之。故政治革命，亦可謂社會革命之一種。今所言者，社會經濟組織上之革命而已，故可謂之狹義的社會革命。

Zhu stated that Liang was referring to the impossibility of establishing communism (*gongchan zhuyi* 共產主義) in the near future, while the *Tongmenghui* advocated state socialism (*guojia shehui zhuyi* 國家社會主義) as a specific variant of “scientific socialism” (*kexue de shehui zhuyi* 科學的社會主義).¹³⁷ This could be established without major difficulties and should not be confused with utopian concepts. He continued by ascribing the reasons for social revolution to the “imperfections” (*bu wanquan* 不完全) of the systems of socio-economic organization. These imperfections, above all the system of private property, resulted in the gap between rich and poor. While this gap in China had not yet reached the dimensions of America or European countries, the deficient system was nevertheless in place and to be overturned through social revolution.¹³⁸ Zhu continued by specifying variants of political and social revolutions, depending on the subject and object of the respective revolutions.

The subject of any political revolution is the common people; its object is the government (broadly understood). The subject of the social revolution are the proletarians, its object is the bourgeoisie. Nowadays, the meaning of the common people and the government is known to everybody. However, *baoyou* and *ximin* have been translated from the European words ‘bourgeois’ and ‘proletarian’. It has to be known that their usage is somewhat different from the Chinese language expressions.¹³⁹

Zhu continued by claiming that the combination of both revolutions made sense in two cases: first, when a feudal leadership combined political and economic power; or, second, when the objects of both revolutions did not interfere. Zhu explained that the latter was the case in China, where the wealthy gentry differed from the Manchu government and both could be overthrown by a popular revolution. Zhu downplayed the importance of violence in conducting social revolution. While the object of political revolution, the Manchu government, had previously been vilified in the harshest terms, the transfer of property would be conducted gradually and in a democratic fashion. The expropriated families would even receive compensation.¹⁴⁰

While Zhu Zhixin popularized the concept of Marxist class labels in public discourse and thus complicated the former notion of an ethnic conflict, he was equally opposed to the view of a never-ending class struggle. Prior to the social revolution, society was said to have consisted of different classes. These classes, however, would disappear as a result of a successful social revolution: “The social revolution uses class struggle as a means. After it has succeeded, there won’t be any economic classes left.”¹⁴¹ Social revolution was not to alienate *Tongmenghui* supporters with a gentry background.

Liang Qichao offered one last criticism of the simultaneous enactment of political and social revolution in a rejoinder to Zhu Zhixin’s article, which strongly argued for incremental development rather than violent revolution.¹⁴² He characterized European class divisions as being the result of

137 Quoted in Zhang Zhan and Wang Renzi 1960, vol. 2, 434–435. The original source misspells the phrase as “scientific socialism”.

138 Quoted in Zhang Zhan and Wang Renzi 1960, vol. 2, 437.

139 Quoted in Zhang Zhan and Wang Renzi 1960, vol. 2, 438: 凡政治革命之主體為平民，其客體為政府（廣義）；社會革命之主體為細民，其客體為豪右。平民、政府之義，今既為眾所共喻，而豪右、細民者，則以譯歐文 Bourgeois, Proletarians 之二字，其用間有與中國文義殊者，不可不知也。 Translation adapted from Bernal 1976, 123.

140 Cf. Zarrow 2012, 205.

141 Quoted in Zhang and Wang 1960, vol. 2, 445.

142 Liang Qichao 1906b, p. 332.

political revolution, which could be avoided by engaging in incremental reforms and thus bypassing radical changes altogether. He followed up with very detailed discussion of economic development and the disadvantages of nationalizing private plots, which was nearly incomprehensible to everyone but his immediate adversaries. Despite his argumentative brilliance, there was no denying the fact that by 1907 Liang had lost out to his radical opponents. Especially among the vastly increased number of Chinese students in Japan, Liang's gradual approach was sharply rejected. The attempted founding of a new reformist organization in Tokyo ended with an outbreak of violence in October 1907, as radicals took over the assembly and even slightly wounded Liang. He shut down his journal a month later, conceding that he lacked the strength to continue single-handedly coping with revolutionaries. "It is like a tumor and I have no more spirit."¹⁴³

The *Minbao* continued to publish its views for another year, before Japanese authorities closed it in October 1908.¹⁴⁴ The last year witnessed a remarkable change of focus, as the journal was taken over after Sun Yat-sen's expulsion from Japan by anarchist writers such as Liu Shipai 劉師培 (1884–1919), who propagated anarchic revolution for a brief period under the inspiration of the Russian example.¹⁴⁵ The decline of public references to the concept of "revolution" witnessed after 1908 may be attributed in part to the closure of the leading newspapers; it also may be due to a shift to questions of "national essence" (*guocui* 國粹) among the formerly leading exponents of the concept who feared a loss of Chinese cultural identity after the abolishment of the examination system.

By late 1908, the concept of "revolution" had witnessed semantic shifts within a decade which had taken at least a century to unfold in case of its European counterparts. From classical associations with dynastic change to xenophobic nationalism and Marxist inspired definitions of social revolution, the term had been extended to cover an ever-wider spectrum of phenomena. "Revolution" had become a thoroughly politicized concept, which the Manchu court tried in vain to suppress. While the Xinhai Revolution was not a citizen revolution in Chen Tianhua's sense, the debates on "revolution" significantly contributed to the erosion of trust in the monarchic system. Hopes for popular sovereignty and democratic rule, however, were to remain unfulfilled.

Conclusion

The article has highlighted five partly overlapping phases during which the concept of "revolution" experienced significant changes, and it has traced three types of semantic change (semantic irritation, strategic practical value, and the loss of plausibility) in relation to the concept. The first period was characterized by the irritation of previous semantic conventions associated with the usage of the word *geming* through Japanese and English loanwords. During the second period, reformers such as Kang Youwei strategically avoided the concept in order to advocate gradual changes under the leadership of the young emperor. After the failure of the Boxer Rebellion and the allied invasion of Beijing, the need

143 Bernal 1976, p. 195.

144 Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883-1944) secretly published another two issues in 1910.

145 The anarchist writings emphasized the international dimension of the Chinese revolution, called for racial equality, and the underscored the priority of social over political revolution. By 1908, however, the most prominent anarchists turned to cultural conservatism, ending the brief discussions of anarchist revolution, cf. Li Weiwu 2011, 25–27. For an example of anarchist views, cf. Zhang and Wang 1960, vol. 2, 947–959.

for fundamental changes became increasingly obvious. Liang Qichao was the most vocal spokesman for combining revolution with evolutionary changes, which he termed “transformation” rather than “revolution.” Yet, far from losing its plausibility, the concept of “revolution” after 1903 reached unparalleled importance by combining anti-Manchu sentiments with calls for national liberation. The year 1903 is thus clearly the most significant turning point in the decade. After 1905, the concept of “revolution” became increasingly politicized and was used as a means of agitation. Debates between reformers and revolutionaries shifted attention from political to social revolution, with the radicals emerging victorious. As Liang Qichao’s friend Yang Du 楊度 (1875–1931) noted in April 1907, not the best argument, but the argument best-suited for a general audience had been successful: “The slogan of ‘Anti-Manchism and Revolution,’ because it corresponds to the level of public understanding, has almost become an irrational religion.”¹⁴⁶

During the Xinhai Revolution of 1912 the concept of “revolution” only played a minor role. Renewed interest began with the New Culture Movement, especially during the 1920s, when competing political parties relied on the concept to frame their visions of future development.¹⁴⁷ The main difference to the late Qing era that should be noted concerned the influence of the Leninist party organization, which turned out to be much more effective in actually enforcing revolutionary policies. The concept of “revolution” in the second half of the 20th century in China is therefore irrevocably linked to attempts at utopian social engineering, which, far from resembling the official narratives of salvation, resulted in loss and tragedy.

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