From *Society* to *Shehui*: The Early Configuration of a Basic Concept in Modern China

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Abstract: As a traditional term used in ancient Chinese, *shiehwui* 社會 mainly implied the gatherings and meetings related to folk festivals for the worship of and making offerings to *shie* 社, the gods of soil. The manifestation of *shiehwui* frequently was the target of condescension or outright condemnation from the government or Confucian elites. During the early dissemination of the western concept of *society* into China, one factor that facilitated its entry was the Christian missionaries' knowledge of traditional Chinese *shie* and *hwui* 會, especially the secret societies, which they applied to their translations from English into Chinese. When the modern concept of *shakai* (written as 社會, the same Chinese characters), formulated in Japan, was imported into Chinese at the turn of the 20th century, it became blended with the old word of *shiehwui*, and found a connection to the daily life experience of the lower classes in traditional China. As a result, the new concept of *shehui* in modern China possesses two kinds of connotations. On the one hand, it points toward the new direction of historical changes. On the other hand, it still retains the associations of condescension, dissatisfaction and anxiety that inform the perspective of the ruling class toward this term.
Keywords: Society, *Shiehwui*, *shakai*, *Shehui*, Modern China

INTRODUCTION

The lexical shift and conceptual transmission from *society* to the Chinese word *shehui* is an important question in the epistemological, intellectual, and cultural history of modern China and East Asia, one that has received much attention from the scholarly world. The linguist Chen Liwei believes that the Chinese word *shiehwui*,[1] which is found in ancient Chinese texts, occasionally was used as an independent word, and this fact played a decisive role in the Japanese choice of *shakai* to translate the western concept of *society* (Chen, 2013: 194). The *English-Chinese Dictionary* (英華字典), which was compiled by W. Lobscheid and widely used in Japan after it was published during 1866-1869 in Hong Kong, translated the concept

of *society* as "hwui, kieh shie, or forming a compact." This may be one of the reasons that spurred the Japanese adoption of *shakai* as the equivalent term for *society* during the Meiji period (Chen, 2013: 198). Other scholars working from the perspective of intellectual history or conceptual history have indicated that after the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War, the translation of the concept of *society* as *qun* (group or crowd) took the Chinese language by storm (Chen, 1982). Nonetheless, in the late-19th to early-20th century, the Japanese neologism *shakai*, written as 社會 (pronounced *shehui* in modern Putonghua), was transmitted to China, where it spread very rapidly, quickly becoming the mainstream translation for the concept of *society* (Lippert, 2003: 113-117; Jin & Liu, 2010: 180-214; Huang, 2008, 2013; Vogelsang, 2014).

It should be noted that the concept of *shehui*, which has achieved currency in modern China, has been marked by ambiguity in both meaning and sensibility. For example, in the *English-Chinese Dictionary of the Standard Chinese Spoken Language* compiled by Karl Hemeling in the late Qing but only published in 1916, the examples used to illustrate the usage of *society* are quite diverse. There are "*shehui*," "*shehui* in general," "association," "people of standing collectively," but also the heterodox sounding "secret society," and so forth (Hemeling, 1916: 1352). Similar to other new nouns that gained currency in this period, *shehui* was subjected to criticism, considered to be "vulgar and superficial, having been lazily and thoughtlessly borrowed from the Japanese" (Anonymous, 1903c: 3). In its concrete manifestation as a new type of civic organization, the concept of *shehui* was often viewed by officialdom as a potential threat to political order.

Why did these phenomena appear? To answer this question, we must address the problem of how concepts imported from the West were brought into conformity with the native Chinese linguistic context. On the basis of previous scholarship, I will attempt to apply the varied perspectives of social history, cultural history, the history of dictionaries, and the history of news communication to investigate the early stages of the meeting between *society* and *shehui*, and also see how traditional indigenous experience influenced the translation, understanding, and acceptance of the modern western concept of *society*.

I. TRADITIONAL CHINESE *SHIEHWUI*

Shiehwui originated in the ancient *shie* 社, which was a gathering for the worship of deities on a certain day. The earliest meaning of this *shie* was of a place where the gods of soil were worshipped, and it was later extended to mean the festival days in spring and fall when the gods of soil were given offerings (Zhang, Chen et. al., eds., 1717: 29-30). According to the Confucian classic, *The Book of Rites* (禮記), the establishment of a *shie* was the prerogative of the ruling group, from the emperor to kings, and then to ministers, and its scale was ranked according to the status of its particular founder within this hierarchy (Kong, 1622: 16). Officials prohibited their subjects from establishing such a shrine, and endeavored to bring *shiehwui* under their effective control. When the famed Song Dynasty Confucian scholar Cheng Hao (程顥, 1032-1085) was appointed to the position as the highest official in the locality of Jincheng, he discovered that its local customs were unrefined or even barbaric. Under these conditions the local residents had formed *shiehwui*, but Cheng Hao issued regulations to bring them under control (Chen, 1985: 149). The *shiehwui* faced by Cheng Hao were still the gatherings held to worship the God of Soil, not the modern *shehui*. His actions clearly demonstrated the intention of officialdom to exert their control over such events.

Worth noting here is the fact that *shiehwui* gradually broke through the form of worship of the gods of soil established by officialdom, and merged with the broader practices of folk worship, developing into more complex local celebrations of the gods. At the same time, they evaded the control of officials, inviting the contempt and disquiet of the official and gentry classes. At the end of the Northern Song, a famous guidebook was written for officials, which contains two examples of public notices issued by government officials for the purpose of instructing ordinary people (Li, 1984: 31, 46). Both of these notices criticize ordinary people for believing that by spending money and participating actively in *shiehwui*, they could avoid disasters and bring good luck to themselves. The notices condemn these as foolish actions, which could only bring the opposite of what was intended. From the official perspective, *shiehwui* activity might even pose a covert threat to social and political order. In the year 1010, the emperor issued an edict that severely restricted the *shiehwui* formed around the Famen Temple (法門寺), because vagrants and idlers participated in their nonstop "festivities", even to the point where incidents of fraud and

murder had taken place in their midst (Liu & Diao et al., 2014: 8287). In 1176 and 1181, similar edicts were issued, because participants in *shiehwui* had carried weapons, directly threatening the ruling order (Liu & Diao et al., 2014: 8347-8349).

In the modern era, but before the word *shehui* returned to China from Japan in the late-19th to early-20th century, the old meaning of *shiehwui* appeared even more frequently in new Chinese media, often connected with various activities with negative images such as excessive luxury, sex, gambling, theft, robbery, and even "religious cults." One of the representatives of these new Chinese media of the modern era, *Shenbao* (*Shun Pao,* 申報), published in Shanghai beginning in 1872, supplied a steady stream of news about these sorts of things. The popularity of *shiehwui* was particularly high in the Ningbo area, and in the years 1879, 1883, 1887, and 1895, local officials repeatedly issued notices to restrict them, prohibiting their engagement of the services of young women or prostitutes, and banning organized gambling and raucous drunkenness that led to disruptive incidents (Anonymous, 1879: 3; 1883: 2; 1887: 12; 1895: 2). To ameliorate the social ills of *shiehwui*, some advocated applying the funds raised by these *shiehwui* to disaster and famine relief. In 1878, an official in Zhejiang Province criticized the people of Hangzhou for believing too credulously in gods and Buddhas, and urged them to use the money collected by *shiehwui* toward helping the residents of the disaster-struck regions in north China (Anonymous, 1878: 3). In 1889, when a flood struck Zhejiang, the gentry of Shaoxing Prefecture gathered contributions and urged the towns and cities to devote half of the funds raised by *shiehwui* to disaster relief (Anonymous, 1889a: 2-3). Some made an even more impassioned proposal that officials expropriate the entire capital of *shiehwui*, as well as the money used to celebrate birthdays, to apply toward disaster relief (Anonymous, 1889b: 3).

In sum, from the medieval period to the end of the 19th century, the old *shiehwui* referred not to associations or other forums for interaction in a general sense, but to a more specific meaning, i.e., the gatherings and meetings related to folk festivals for the worship of and making offerings to the gods of soil. These gatherings and meetings extricated themselves from government control, and through the exercise of folk spontaneity and autonomy, they manifested an implicitly oppositional stance toward the ethical order strenuously enforced by the government. Due to this, from the perspective of the mainstream official-gentry class, the old

shiehwui not only wasted the peasants' money and energies, they also damaged public order and thus had to be brought under supervision, restriction, and even temporary interdiction. As for the so-called "secret societies" or "secret associations" like the Triads or Elders, because they were often associated with criminal activities or political rebellions, they were regarded as heterodoxies by the government, and throughout the Qing were subject to severe punishment and even complete suppression (Qin, 2009). Behind the old-style *shiehwui* the implications extend to the shadowy standoff between the government and the general population, and the attitude of dismissive condescension exhibited by officialdom or elites toward their inferiors. This constituted the indigenous context into which the modern concept of *society* was transmitted into China.

II. USING *HWUI* AND *SHIE* TO TRANSLATE *SOCIETY*

The English word *society* has its root in the Latin *socius*, which means "partner or associate." By the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, *society* had become a concept that enjoyed a definite level of public awareness. The inaugural 1771 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains it as follows: "society, in general, denotes a number of persons united together for their mutual assistance, security, interest, or entertainment." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1771: 614) By the fourth edition of 1797, it distinguished between the abstract sense of *society* and the concrete meaning of *societies*. The author of the entry concisely defined *society* as "a number of rational and moral beings, united for their common preservation and happiness." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1797: 568) It summarized human society as evolving from rudeness to refinement, followed by decay, and gave the reasons for this trend, which "[represent] the human form in infancy, puerility, youth, and manhood." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1797: 575) *Societies* were defined as "associations voluntarily formed by a number of individuals for promoting knowledge, industry, or virtue." The author also clearly declared that "[t]he honour of planning and instituting societies for those valuable purposes is due to modern times." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1797: 575)

The formation of the concept of *society* in the Anglophone world, and especially of its meaning as a tangible form of association, which was then introduced by westerners, especially missionaries, to China, gradually found its footing in the daily lives of Chinese. Due to the fact that Catholic

and Protestant Christian evangelization was restricted by the Qing government up until the end of the Second Opium War in 1860, missionaries were mostly active among the lower strata of Chinese society in Southeast Asia and in southern China. In the process, they gradually gained an experiential understanding of the concrete dimensions of the formation of associations in the everyday lives of ordinary Chinese, including the societies that, in the eyes of the literati and officialdom, were tainted with negative and even heterodox implications. The series of English-Chinese dictionaries compiled by missionaries provide concrete evidence of these phenomena.

In the Chinese-English dictionary compiled by the British missionary R. Morrison (1782-1834), we find the following Chinese and English examples that illustrate the meaning of *society*: 1) "of persons who voluntarily unite their names and subscribe money for some public concern, 聯名簽題會 *lëen ming tsëen te hwuy*"; 2) "committee of management, 值事的各人 *chĭh sze tëĭh kŏ jin*"; 3) "treasurer, 司庫 *sze koo*"; 4) "recording secretary, 書記 *shoo ke*" (Morrison, 1822: 398). Here, Morrison specifically discusses the similarities between *society* and *hwui* and how both arise from the formation of a voluntary association that possesses some goals in common. This demonstrates that the author had a general understanding of the mechanics behind the formation of the basis for European *society* and traditional Chinese *shiehwui*. The words *social* and *association* were not included in this dictionary.

The Chinese-English dictionary compiled by the British missionary W. H. Medhurst (1796-1857) and published in Shanghai in 1847-1848 defines *society* as "會 *hwúy,* 結社 *këĕ shày*", with two examples, "a society for the maintenance of religious services", and "the white lotus society" (Medhurst, 1848: 1189). Here, it is worth noting that the White Lotus Society originally referred to a well-known Buddhist organization of the medieval period, but it also calls to mind the Lotus Teaching that was highly influential after the Yuan Dynasty, and known for its heterodox character. W. H. Medhurst also defined *association* as: 1) "society, 會 *hwúy*"; 2) "intercourse, 黨羽 *tàng yù,* 交際 *keaou tse,* 交親 *keaou ts'hin*" (Medhurst, 1847: 80). Clearly, through Medhurst, the definition of *society* that corresponded to Chinese indigenous experiential knowledge added two additional layers. One was the religious societies that had a Protestant background; the other were the societies which, in Chinese tradition,

carried the taint of heterodoxy. This latter aspect is especially noteworthy, as it involves an even more complex question, that of the Westerners' understanding and research into secret societies among ordinary Chinese.

To the westerners who came to China in the first part of the 19th century, if the White Lotus Society seemed comparatively ancient or distant from their contemporary experience, the Chinese Triads were a vivid presence in their daily lives. Across Southeast Asia, the Triads had become a mutual aid organization operating openly among the Chinese there, intersecting with and permeating other types of Chinese social organizations. They widely participated in and even led many of the internal activities of the local Chinese population, becoming embroiled in the disputes and conflicts between the Chinese, the indigenous population, and the European colonial authorities (Cai, 1987: 371-405). They were even involved in many gray industries and criminal activities. This sort of highly influential Chinese organization naturally attracted the attention of colonial authorities in Southeast Asia as well as missionaries in China. While W. H. Medhurst was working in the Malacca Chinese College, his colleague and superior W. Milne (1785-1822) became the first westerner to conduct research on the Triads. Later, R. Morrison, K. Gützlaff (1803-1851), and T. J. Newbold (1807-1850) followed him in publishing more about this phenomenon. By 1866, G. Schlegel (1840-1903), a Chinese interpreter working for the Dutch East India Company, published the first monograph ever produced anywhere about the Chinese Triads. These authors understood such organization as a type of "secret association" or "secret society" (Li, 2015). It is worth noting that G. Schlegel considered the Triads to be part of the same phenomenon as the White Lotus Society, even if his views on this topic were not clearly articulated (Schlegel, 1866: 4).

In the English-Chinese dictionary which he published in 1866-1869, W. Lobscheid (1822-1893) collected and reflected upon the knowledge about private associations among the Chinese that westerners had been able to accumulate over the previous half century. This dictionary has been considered to represent the highest achievement of all 19th century Chinese-English dictionaries compiled by westerners, and had a great influence in Japan as well (Shen, 2010: 125, 131). *Society* is glossed there as *hwui* or *kieh shié*, and many concrete examples are provided. For example, the triad society, the white lotus society, an Evangelization Society, the Chinese Evangelization Society, a public society. It also mentions "to enter

a society," "ditto a secret society." (Lobscheid, 1869: 1628) *Association* is explained as "the act of associating", "a society or club", and here, too, a number of examples are adduced, such as a private association (similar to a savings bank), the Longevity Association, a literary association, the poet's association, the association for mutual protection. Especially noteworthy is that it also brings up several different ways to express "to join an association." Among these is 拜會 *pái hwui*, with the following appended English footnote: "This term is only applied to joining an association formed for revolutionary or other unlawful purposes. It's very sound frightens Chinese officers, hence should be used with great discretion even in conversation." (Lobscheid, 1866: 102)

From W. Lobscheid's examples and definitions, it can be seen that in Chinese the concept of *society* corresponded to three different types of associations: 1) ordinary associations of daily life; 2) religious associations; and 3) political associations of a rebellious or subversive nature. This clearly is closely related to the personal experience and knowledge of the author. W. Lobscheid came from a German-speaking area of Europe, and worked as a missionary for a lengthy period in Hong Kong and neighboring areas, where he engaged in education and publishing. In the early years he served as K. Gützlaff's assistant, and later took over as the manager of the Chinese Evangelization Society (Shen, 2010: 128-129). As Lobscheid was engaged in the task of compiling this dictionary, he utilized the American *Webster's English Dictionary* (probably the 1847 edition) as his principal source (Xiong, 2014: 56-58). At the same time, as a missionary of long residence in China and with considerable knowledge of Chinese language and culture, Lobscheid also included his on-the-ground observations of social interactions and the formation of private associations among the Chinese in daily life as supporting evidence to explain the term *society*. As previously discussed, K. Gützlaff conducted significant research on the Triads. W. Lobscheid not only had contact with Gützlaff, he lived in and around Hong Kong for a lengthy period, which probably led him to achieve a relatively good understanding of the Triads. In particular, his gloss of the term *pái hwui* demonstrates that he was quite clear about the taint of heterodoxy that colored the views of Chinese officialdom toward these sorts of associations.

Bilingual dictionaries compiled by missionaries were written by foreigners to serve the needs of foreigners studying Chinese. The slightly later English-Chinese dictionary *Zidian jicheng* (1868) and its revised edition

Hua-Ying zidian jicheng (華英字典集成), compiled by Kuang Qizhao (鄺其照, 1836-1895), was the product of a Chinese writer. In the years following its publication, it exerted a broad and deep influence on Chinese people (Si, 2016: 107-114). This dictionary's definitions of association and society show the influence of both R. Morrison and W. Lobscheid. As late as the dictionary *Ying-Hua da cidian* (英華大辭典, 1908) compiled by W. W. Yen (顏惠慶, 1877-1950), like W. Lobscheid's and other dictionaries, it explained *society* through concrete examples, and it also brings up experiential knowledge of various kinds, including yet other types of such "secret societies."

In sum, China missionaries from R. Morrison to W. Lobscheid became experts in bilingual research, and played an important role as intermediaries in communicating language, vocabulary, and concepts between China and the West. Nonetheless, these missionaries were not experts in political thought or social theory, and in translating the word *society*, their focus was not on presenting a full, accurate summary of the semantic range of this concept, but rather to understand the direct, concrete social interactions of Chinese in daily life. Hence, the concept of *society* which they illustrated was one that foregrounded the perspective of daily life, the lifestyles of ordinary people, and the taint of heterodoxy. As such, their sense of *society* was in synch with the pre-modern meanings of *shiehwui*.

III. THE AMBIGUITY OF THE MODERN CHINESE CONCEPT OF *SHEHUI*

As European society industrialized in the mid-19th century, the concept of *society* underwent new changes.[2] On the one hand, sociology began to develop, and following A. Comte's (1798-1857) official proposal of the term sociology, K. Marx (1818-1883) and H. Spencer (1820-1903) respectively constructed their own unique theoretical systems. Both advocated *society* as a basic conceptual parameter that entered into the very center of an increasingly nuanced and complex theoretical domain, which gradually exerted an ever-greater influence internationally. On the other hand, as shown in the famed *The English Cyclopaedia*, the tangible manifestations of this term, like *societies* and *associations*, were even more conspicuous, and their relationship with the everyday lives of ordinary people even closer. The principle of free association of these societies,

and of the freedom of the individual to form societies, as well as the changes that such associations brought to people's lives, had already become a major characteristic of European public life (Knight, 1861: 641).

With this background, after the 1860s China and Japan both proceeded further in opening up their countries, and a group of reformist elites in each country began to pay more attention to Western society, to study and translate works about political and social theory, and to stimulate the genuine indigenization of this foreign concept in East Asian linguistic contexts. Japan took the lead in this development, so that by the 1880s, the translation of *society* as *shakai* had gradually become established (Chen, 2013: 195-198). Numerous works and theories of western sociologists were translated and introduced into Japan. Tokyo University established a specialized course of study, and appointed Masakazu Toyama (1848-1900), who had studied in Europe and the US, as Professor of Sociology. In this way, the Japanese term *shakai*, which had been borrowed from the ancient Chinese characters 社會, transformed into a completely new fundamental concept. It denoted in its concrete sense the different types of social organizations, and in its more abstract sense, the state of total human groupings. This new basic concept was embedded within a vocabulary of modern political and social theory that had been brought from the West and was gradually undergoing systematization. Together, they represented iconic markers of modernity, and indicated the direction of contemporary changes.

Chinese intellectuals would have to wait another 20 years before they could directly participate in this knowledge system of East and West as Japan was able to do, and to develop a self-conscious examination of the concept of *society* at an academic level. The most famous example is that of Yan Fu (嚴復, 1854-1921), who translated the important works of H. Spencer and others into Chinese. By that time, however, the principal object of China's study and emulation had already shifted from Europe to Japan. Japanese translations of European political thought and social theory, including the concept of *society*, had become the main source of new knowledge for Chinese. Under these conditions, although Yan Fu's carefully considered decision to translate *society* as *qun* did result in this latter term's adoption for a period of time, it did not take long for it to be swept aside by the new term of *shehui* that came from Japan. The previous research cited above gives a full account of this shift, and thus I will not belabor this point here.

It is worth noting that both *qun* and *shakai* are concepts replete with positive connotations, and express the "fundamental and ultimate principles" and "fundamental social cohesiveness" that new intellectuals were formulating and seeking during this time of transition between the old order and the new (Vogelsang, 2014: 113). However, the new concept of *shehui* could not shake itself free from its old identity as *shiehwui*, which had been the object of a highly condescending attitude from official and elite perspectives, nor could it escape from the other image of this term manifested in W. Lobscheid's English-Chinese dictionary. In both meaning and sensibility, it was quite ambiguous.

On the one hand, the new type of social formation indicated by this concept of *shehui* was seen as both representing the direction of historical change, and bearing the heavy responsibility of determining the nation's fate. The new intellectuals understood that *shehui* is the mother of the nation, and if *shehui* can improve, then the nation naturally can change its appearance"(Fei, 1903: 28); or, "a healthy nation does not have a decaying *shehui*, and a decaying *shehui* cannot build a healthy nation"(Da, 1903: 10); "the nation is the collective totality of the *shehui*, and with a new *shehui* there can be a new nation, and with public virtue that cherishes the whole there can be a *shehui*" (Jue, 1904: 9). Someone went so far as to write: "From the rise or fall of a nation's fortunes, one can always discern the changes of *shehui* as the measure and determinant of the nation's success. Bringing people together makes a *shehui*, and bringing *shehui* together creates a nation. A nation's civilization sprouts from the seeds of its *shehui*." (Anonymous, 1907: 151) In light of such reasoning, it was natural for *shehui* to become the goal toward which great efforts in advocacy and reconstruction were directed.

From another perspective, the new concept of *shehui* was often linked to linguistic contexts that evoked the uneasiness, disdain, or dissatisfaction of officials and elites. The gentry and some of the new intellectuals regarded themselves as members of the "upper crust of *shehui*", and were often derisory toward or critical of the lower rungs of *shehui* that constituted the bulk of the population. Someonesaid "the customs and mores of our lower ranks of *shehui* are despicable and unenlightened" (Anonymous, 1905d: 2). Another author castigated "the lower ranks of *shehui*" as "only concerned with profit, for which they are even willing to sink to the status of slaves or animals without regret" (Anonymous, 1905b: 2). Some also worried that "the lower ranks of *shehui* are easily stirred up

to cause trouble" (Anonymous, 1905c: 2). Not a few people regarded "Chinese society" as a whole to be in a deplorable state. A new publication that was rapidly gaining in stature, *Dongfang zazhi* (*The Eastern Miscellany,* 東方雜誌), published many articles that discussed these issues, claiming that "our *shehui* today is thoroughly corrupt" (Anonymous, 1904: 173-174); "Chinese society has no public virtue, no true strength, no learning, and no thought, and is descending even further into depths of depravity; it is unworthy of any positive evaluation by the world at large" (Anonymous, 1905a: 287); "improving *shehui*, and forging a new collective, is the first question in rescuing us from these times" (Anonymous, 1907: 152). There was a group of radicals who were not satisfied with simply carrying out improvements to society; they called for "guiding the lower ranks of *shehui* to rectify the upper ranks" (Zhang & Wang eds., 1960: 615). They also borrowed Japanese phraseology, saying "the lower ranks of *shehui* are the backbone of the revolutionary cause; the middles are its vanguard" (Anonymous, 1903a: 7). Ou Qujia (歐榘甲， 1870-1911) even said openly that through allying with *mimi shehui* (secret societies) they could seek the independence of Guangdong, which would become the base for achieving the "independence of all of China" (Ou, 1902: 37, 49). In the wake of these revolutionary currents and with the first introduction of socialist thought, *shehui zhuyi* (socialism) and *shehui geming* (social revolution) began to appear regularly in the Chinese media.

This *shehui* that was a mixture of old and new, and especially the substantive political associations, formed a potential threat to the governing order, and for this reason, in the eyes of the government and officials, naturally had to be surveilled and guarded against at all times. Articles were published in newspapers in which their authors argued that speech and association would only "destroy the people's minds, and constrict the nation's pulse" (Anonymous, 1903b: 1). Subsequently, the Qing government issued regulations that strictly forbade students from "meddling in national politics, betraying basic principles, forming alliances to stir up acrimony in the population, or holding meetings to deliver speeches" (The First Historical Archives of China, 1996: 300). After the Qing government proclaimed its intention to establish a constitutional monarchy, associations and groups throughout the country became extremely active, and this aroused consternation in the highest echelons of power. In 1908, the government promulgated the Assembly and Association Act (結社集會律) with 35 articles, and put it into effect. On

the one hand, this law acknowledged that *shehui* had a positive meaning, and could be beneficial for culture and the orderly rule of the nation. But on the other hand, it also reflected concern that *shehui* could not be constrained. Hence, it contained the following stipulations: (1) The associations and parties in each province that belonged to secret societies must all be severely punished according to existing criminal law; (2) associations and groups of a political nature must register with government departments prior to being established; and (3) associations concerned with other types of public business are not uniformly required to register, but if officials issue an order for them to register, they should comply. Any association or group, should it "have improper purposes, or violate regulations," or potentially "stir up trouble or harm public mores" would without exception be subject to thorough investigation by local government authorities. If deemed insignificant they would be disbanded, but if the violations were serious, they would be punished (Anonymous, 1908: 228-230). We can see from this that the ruling classes both recognized and continued to hold onto the traditional attitudes of anxiety, vigilance, and control toward the potential threats posed by political associations. This kind of anxiety, vigilance, and control extended up to the highest levels of government offices, while clearly also taking the form of modern legal statutes.

After the Republican period began, the government continued to be vigilant toward these social organizations. In September 1912, the Interior Ministry issued a survey of social organizations that was based on the guiding principle that "forming associations should be free, but the power to protect citizens resides with government officials." The survey included the organization's name, foundational principles, place of operations, the names and occupations of founders and responsible officers, the number of members, the date of founding, and the date on which approval was granted. It requested that each province conduct a detailed survey based on this model, and once it had collected data, to report them to the Interior Ministry. The provinces were also required to submit additional reports every three months about newly established clubs, cases of disbandment, or name changes (Anonymous, 1912: 3-4). In March 1914, the Republican government promulgated and implemented the Public Order and the Police Act (治安警察條例), which clearly delegated the policing of local *shehui* to administrative agencies at various levels (Anonymous, 1914: 1-10). Any civic meeting or outdoor gathering

concerning political or public affairs, and all public sports or recreational activities, were required to first report to the local police. If a government agency felt that the organization or event might "disrupt the peace or harm public morals or decency" or act as a secret society, the organization or event would be ordered to disband or disperse. During the meeting itself, the police could send uniformed officers to supervise the activities. This sort of monitoring and control of *shehui* did not change in any substantial way after the establishment of the Nationalist Government. Up through December 1931, when the KMT convened the Fourth Plenary Conference, Li Liejun (李烈鈞, 1882-1946) and ten other Central Executive Committee members solemnly proposed that "the people's right to exercise the freedoms of assembly, association, speech, publication, residence, and belief are fully guaranteed"(Anonymous, 1932: 82-85). Although this draft article was passed by the conference, it would be implemented through a long process that was beset by considerable resistance.

CONCLUSION

The early encounter between *society* and *shehui* embodies the confluence of western-derived modernity with traditional indigenous experience. The word *shiehwui* in the ancient Chinese lexicon principally referred to the gatherings and meetings related to folk festivals for the worship of and making offerings to the gods of soil. It was linked implicitly to the stance of seeking control over and condescension toward these activities exhibited by officialdom and elites who looked down on them from the heights of their exalted social status. The tradition of forming social bonds, including heterodox associations practiced by ordinary Chinese in their everyday lives, provided an experiential basis for the concept of *society* during the early years of its entry into the Chinese linguistic context. The English-Chinese bilingual dictionaries compiled by missionaries in China during the first part of the 19th century reflect these trends very concretely. In the mid- to late-19th century, the process by which the modern concept of *shakai* developed in Japan exhibited a different trajectory. Nevertheless, the newly-hatched Japanese concept of modern *shakai* spread to China in the late-19th to early 20th century, where it became intertwined with the older Chinese term *shiehwui* and its associated experiences. In the end, the traditional Chinese indigenous experience exerted a substantive influence

over the development of the modern Chinese concept of *shehui*, as well as on Chinese thinking and practices regarding modern society. The meaning of the newly imported concept of *shehui* was consonant with the new direction of contemporary changes, while also retaining the disdain and dissatisfaction toward it by officialdom and elite, who continued to perceive it as a latent threat to the ruling order. Such views of *shehui* foreshadow the direction of further configuration of relations between state and society in China during the following decades.

Notes

Proofread by Stephen Roddy, University of San Francisco.

[1] This article uses *shiehwui*, which had been used by China missionaries in 19th century, to refer to the traditional term 社會 in ancient Chinese, and *shehui* to refer to the new concept of 社會 that formed in the modern era, in order to distinguish between these two senses of the same Chinese characters.

[2] For a brief history of the development of *society* as a modern concept in Europe, see Manfred Riedel, "Gesellschaft-Gemeinschaft", Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (hg.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Bd.2 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1975), pp. 801-862; Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, Revised Edition*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 291-295.

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