

## A Study of the Linguistic and Conceptual Development of *Diguo zhuyi* (Imperialism)

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**Abstract:** This article first describes how the classical Chinese word *diguo* 帝国 was used in Japan as a translation of the Dutch language and thus into English, and then looks at the establishment and use of the term *Diguo zhuyi* (imperialism) in Japan. Finally, it describes how the Chinese language media in Japan, the *Qingyi Bao*, was quickly converted into a Chinese concept by translating the Japanese newspaper.

**Keywords:** Keizerdom, Koutoku Shusui, Liang Qichao, *Qingyi Bao*, Lenin

Although the characters *diguo* 帝国 had long been used in Chinese classical literature, their meaning was not unequivocal or clearly defined. When the term became popular in Japan in the 18th and 19th century, it was at first used to translate the corresponding Dutch word Keizerdom. This Japanese-Dutch translation was picked up by the British missionary Walter Henry Medhurst (1796-1857). In his dictionary *An English and Japanese, and Japanese and English Vocabulary*, 1830, he used the Japanese term *teikoku* 帝国 to translate the English term “empire”. Subsequently, the dictionary entry found its way to Japan where it was adopted by the English-Japanese dictionaries. Remarkably, however, this particular translation was not included in any English-Chinese dictionary of the 19th century.

The translated term for the English concept of imperialism made its first appearance in Japan in 1898. Immediately thereafter, it was translated and introduced in the *Qingyi Bao* 清议报 (*China Discussion*, 1898-1901) edited by Liang Qichao (梁启超, 1873-1929) in Yokohama who also expounded the concept. The expansionary reality of the imperial project soon gave birth to a sustained critique of imperialism. The revolutionary Zhang Binglin (章炳麟, 1869-1936) joined the chorus of representatives of weaker nations lashing out at it, with Lenin’s succinct formula of “Imperialism being the highest stage of capitalist development”

marking the high point of the critique of imperialism's inherently belligerent nature. This is all the more important because the spread of imperialism went on to shape the first half of the 20th century.

## I. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN *DIGUO* AND EMPIRE

In Chinese classical literature, the characters *diguo* 帝国 refer to a state controlled by an emperor. *Wenzhongzi's Recorded Utterances: Inquiry Chapter* (文中子·问易) from the Sui Dynasty states that, "A powerful country uses its army to fight, a hegemony uses wisdom, a kingdom uses justice, an empire uses benevolence, and an imperial state lets things take their own course". Evidently, *diguo* originally denoted a country ruled by virtue, as distinct from a "kingdom" and "imperial state". Later in the Song Dynasty, Zhou Bangyan's *ci* (词 a type of classical Chinese poetry) named *Kanhuahui* 看花回 included the important line, "When the clouds flew to the *diguo*, I was secretly filled with heartfelt admiration by the clouds" (*Hanyu dacidian* 汉语大词典, 1989, 3: 712). Here, *diguo* refers to the capital where the emperor is located, that is, the capital of a country. This shows that *diguo* in Chinese classical literature was not yet a clearly-defined term, with a meaning different from today's.

The integration of *diguo* with Western concepts first appeared in Japanese materials. The engraved Japanese edition of the Chinese book *Wenzhongzi's Recorded Utterances*, which included punctuation marks for training students in reading Chinese, was published in the eighth year of Genroku in the Edo period (1695), making the term familiar to the Japanese elite. In the first year of Kansei (1789), the Japanese translation and edition of the *Theory of the Map of Far West* (*Taisei yochi zusetu* 泰西輿地图说) used *diguo* to translate the word *Keizerdom* from Dutch to Japanese. In the first Dutch-Japanese dictionary *Yedo Halma* 波留麻和解 published in the eighth year of Kansei in the Edo Period (1796), it was translated as "the authority of the emperor"; and *Keizerlijk* was translated as "the kingdom of the emperor". In the early 19th century, the Dutch-Japanese translation dictionary *Yak'-ken* 译键 (1810), which was used by Japanese to translate Dutch, changed the translation of *Keizerdom* from "Empire" to "King's people, Empire and King's authority". In the same year, in another Japanese-Dutch dictionary *Nieuw Verzameld Japans en hollandsch Woordenboek* (*Rango yakusen* 兰语译撰, 1810), 帝国 *Tei Koku* was also

translated as “Keyzerryk”. Later, in *An English and Japanese, and Japanese and English Vocabulary* (1830), published by Walter Henry Medhurst in Batavia, the English word “Empire” was directly translated into Japanese as *teikoku* 帝国 (i.e. the characters that in China would be read as *diguo*) in the English-Japanese section with pronunciation and katakana given as follows: Empire ‘Te-i Kokf’ テイコク (*teikoku*) 帝国.

In the Japanese-English section of the dictionary, the above positioning was reversed and rearranged once. Medhurst had never been to Japan. His knowledge of Japanese derived from Dutch-Japanese dictionaries as well as Japanese-Dutch translation dictionaries compiled by Japanese. It was not until more than twenty years later that the dictionary was reprinted by Eishun Murakami (1811-1890) as *Yei-go-sen* (英語箋, 1857), and was later the first English-Japanese dictionary, *A Pocket Dictionary of the English and Japanese Language* (英和对译袖珍辞书, 1862), firmly establishing the translation of Empire as *teikoku* 帝国.

In contrast, the term *diguo* was not used in a series of English-Chinese dictionaries published in China in the 19th century. For example, in the earliest *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language, Part III* (1822) compiled by Robert Morrison (1782-1834), the English “Empire” was directly translated as “Empire of Manchoo Tartars (大清国)”, while it was translated as “Emperor’s State” in the most influential English-Chinese dictionary of the 19th century, *English and Chinese Dictionary, with the Pundi and Mandarin Pronunciation* (英华字典, 1866-1869) compiled by William Lobscheid (1822-1893).

In the earlier Japanese materials, such as *The Lexicographical Translation of Elements of International Law* (万国公法译义, 1868), which was translated into Japanese based on the Chinese version of *Elements of International Law* (万国公法, 1868) translated by Ding Weiliang, the term was used in the annotations to “Monaco”:

摩納哥 帝國ニ非ズ。其國ノ位公候ニテ、大名ノ位也。

Monaco is not an empire. Its status is like that of a duke or a marquis, equivalent to the name of Japan.

This explanation was certainly not in the original Chinese version of *Elements of International Law*.

In the early Meiji period, the Japanese Enlightenment thinker Fukuzawa Yukichi had also used this term in his famous *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (文明论之概略, 1875), “羅馬の帝国滅亡したりと雖ども (Although the Roman Empire has collapsed).” This shows that the modern meaning of the term as “a country controlled by an emperor with a monarchical form of government” was used in Japan earlier than in China. In the middle of the Meiji period, with the rise of nationalism, Japan established a constitutional monarchy with the emperor at the center, formally calling itself “the Greater Japanese Empire” in the Meiji Constitution (1889). Around this period, institutions and other entities with the word “empire” in their names, e.g., “Imperial University”, “Imperial Theater”, “Imperial Academy”, “Imperial Museum” and “Imperial Hotel”, sprung up.

At the end of the Qing Dynasty, some Chinese intellectuals called the Qing Dynasty the Qing Empire. Tan Zuomin, a member of the Southern Society, wrote in his poem *My Thoughts during Boating on the Huanghai Sea in the Year of Dingwei* (丁未黄海舟中感赋, 1907), “The imperial court has boundary so that the emperor can only abandon deep meditation, and there’s a lack of talents who can rule by force and make arbitrary decisions in the empire.” (*Hanyu dacidian*, 1989, 3: 712) In fact, the term “帝国” in Japanese was already introduced into China before that. For example, Huang Zunxian’s work *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects from Japan* (*Riben zashishi* 日本杂事诗, 1879) included the line, “It is called the Mikado on the inside, and Empire on the outside.” Therefore, it’s like bringing Japanese words back to Chinese directly. Of course, the aforementioned translation of Morrison’s *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language* mirrored foreigners’ perception of the Qing Dynasty, which was an important factor that triggered the introduction of the new term *diguo*.

## II. THE ORIGIN OF IMPERIALISM

The Japanese and Chinese term that came to be used to translate the word “Imperialism” came from the English language. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (<http://www.oed.com>), the word seems to have made its first appearance in 1858. This concept was originally a political term based on the British context after 1870, referring to expansionism or colonialism that emerged from liberalism. At the end of the 19th century,

it became the main ideology driving the expansion of European countries and the United States.

We know that the corresponding translation of *-ism* and “syugi 主義” in Japanese had already appeared in *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (哲学字汇, 1881) in Meiji 14, or even earlier appeared in newspapers in Meiji 10 (Chen, 2012: 146). Since the concept of empire had existed, adding the “-ism” would have naturally created a word for the “ideology of empire”, but in the early English-Japanese dictionaries in Japan, for instance *An English and Japanese Dictionary* (附音插图英和字汇, 1873) in Meiji 6, imperialism was only translated as, “the throne of the emperor (帝位)”, and the subsequent expanded and revised editions retained the initial translation until Meiji 20 (1887). Although the article “The Collision of Education and Religion” (教育与宗教之冲突) written by Tetsujiro Inoue, a professor of University of Tokyo published in the January and February Issues of *Education Review* (教育时论) in Meiji 26 (1893), mentioned that, “彼等も亦多少羅馬帝国の主義に同化したるならん (They are also more or less identical to the doctrine/-ism of the Roman Empire),” “-ism” was not yet an unambiguously defined term. Because Japan called itself an empire, people were unwilling to combine empire with “-ism”. In the early days, Japanese often used terms such as “colonies” to describe the expansion of Europe and America. A more direct link between the Western concept of “Imperialism” and what came eventually known as “*teikokusyugi* 帝国主義” in Japanese was formed around 1898. Takayama Chogyu (1871-1902) first used the transliteration of this concept イムビリアリズム (Imperialism) in the article “Lessons from Colonies and History” (殖民地与历史的教训) published in September 1898:

米國は遂に全菲律賓の佔有を斷行すべしと傳へらる。  
『イムビリアリズム』は遂に西班牙に勝ちたる米國を征服せり。

It is rumored that the United States will eventually occupy the Philippines in its entirety. “Imperialism” finally took over the United States, which had defeated Spain (*Observation of the times* 時代管見, Hakubunkan, 1899: 208).

And then in *The Sinful Year of 1898* (罪惡的 1898 年) written at the end of 1898, we can see the word “imperialism” in quotation marks:

二個の事實とは何ぞや、極東問題の解釋は其一也、北米合衆國『帝國主義』は其二也。

What are these two facts? One is the interpretation of the Far East issue, and the second is the “imperialism” of the United States of America (Hakubunkan, 1899: 221).

The so-called Far East issue referred to the invasion of China by the great powers: in March of that year, Germany had occupied Jiaozhou Bay while Russia had occupied Lushun and Dalian and obtained the concession to lay the South Manchurian Railway; later, the British occupied Kowloon and Weihaiwei. The second fact pointed out referred to the ambition of the United States to occupy the Philippines. Takayama Chogyu saw that imperialism had become a general trend that was spreading across the globe, arguing that, “This is the beginning of the bleakest episode in human history.” (Hakubunkan, 1899: 222) The next year, Tottomi Choyichiro (1863-1957) included the section “*Teikokusyugi no shingi* 帝國主義の真義” in his book *Society and People* (*Syakai to jinbutsu* 社会と人物, Published by Minyusya), observing that the concept of “imperialism” had been born in Britain, was later introduced to Japan via the United States, and was currently becoming a frequently-used term in political circles. Nevertheless, the direct translation of the English term “imperialism” with the characters *teikokusyugi* 帝國主義 had not yet made an appearance in the dictionaries at that time.<sup>1</sup>

An article titled *Exclude Imperialism* (帝國主義を排す *teikokusyugi wo haisuru*) was published in the Newspaper *Yorozu chōhō* (万朝報) on November 17th in the 33rd year of the Meiji era (1900), which commenced thus:

英國の総選挙に於いて、いわゆる帝國主義は勝利を獲たり、米國の大統領選挙に於いて、またいわゆる帝國主義は勝利を獲たり、故に萬人皆曰く、帝國主義は世界の大勢なり、これに順う者は榮え、これに逆らうもの亡ぶ、我が國

民またこれを以ってその主義、目的とせざるべからずと。  
帝國主義とは、そもそも何事を意味するか。

In the British election, the victor was the so-called imperialism; the American election also represented the victory of imperialism. Therefore, people now say that imperialism is the general trend of the world. Those who obey it will be honored, and those who oppose it will perish. Our citizens have no choice but to regard it as their doctrine and purpose. But what does imperialism mean?

Evidently, from the perspective of Japanese observers, imperialism was the main driving force behind much of Europe and America around the turn of the century. In the Japanese literature of the time, the term “*teikokusyugi*” appeared most frequently in 1901. This year witnessed the publication of *Imperialism* (帝國主義, Meiji 34) written by Koutoku Shusui (1871-1911) and the publication of *Imperialism and Education* (帝國主と教育, Meiji 34) by Ukita Watami (1859-1946), with the latter explicitly introducing the idea of “Japanese imperialism” in the first chapter. In the same year, it was used in 71 cases in the magazine *Taiyō* (太陽 The Sun). At the end of the year, a translation of *On Imperialism* (帝國主義論) by Takada Sanae (1860-1938) was published by Tokyo Vocational school (December of Meiji 34). The word was also frequently used in the book *One Year and a Half* (一年有半) written by Nakae Chomin (1847-1901), a famous civil rights activist:

民権是れ至理也、自由平等是れ大義也、此等理義に反する者は竟に之れが罰を受けざる能はず、百の帝國主義有りと難も此理義を減没することは終に得可らず。

The protection of People’s rights is our most important principle, and freedom and equality are the cardinal principles of righteousness. How can those who oppose this kind of principles not be punished? Even hundreds of imperialists can hardly abolish these principles.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of “imperialism” was explained in more detail in the *Glossary of Ordinary Terms* (普通术语辞汇, Keibun sya Press, 1905) as:

帝國主義とは、政治的意義の語にして、一言以て謂へば、帝國の拡張を以て社会生存の最高善又は最良策となすものを謂ふ、故に如何なる理想如何なる主義を有するに関わらず、帝國主義とは、自己の勢力を用ゐる機会の許す限り、世界の表面に於て可成的多くの領土を割取し、又は割取するに至らざる迄も、其の勢力範圍を扶植するを以て主義となすものと謂つて可なり。

The so-called imperialism, from a political perspective, is to use imperial expansion as the supreme means of survival in the world. Therefore, no matter what ideals or doctrines they have, as long as they have the opportunity to use their own power, the imperialist will carve up as much territory as possible. Even if this step is not possible, they will take expanding their sphere of influence as their doctrine.

### III. THE EARLY USAGE OF *DIGUO ZHUYI* IN THE CHINESE CONTEXT

The *Qingyi Bao* (清议报, issued three times per month), edited by Liang Qichao, published a total of 100 volumes during the three years between December 23, 1898 to December 31, 1901 in Japan. It is all written in Chinese, and it reflects the authors's initial understanding of various doctrines, and allows us to apprehend the scale of new Chinese terms introduced from Japan in this period. If we divide the *Qingyi Bao* into three issues according to date of publication, the frequency of *diguo zhuyi* being mentioned, and their proportion vis-à-vis the total number of “-isms” (*zhuyi*) are as follows:

	Volume Numbers	Date	<i>diguo zhuyi</i> frequency	Proportion of “isms” ( <i>zhuyi</i> )	Total Number of “-isms”
1 <sup>st</sup> Issue	Vol. 01 to Vol. 33	1898.11-1899.11	6	4%	151
2 <sup>nd</sup> Issue	Vol. 34 to Vol. 68	1900.01-1900.11	11	7.5%	146
3 <sup>rd</sup> Issue	Vol. 69 to Vol. 100	1900.11-1901.11	111	40.3%	275
Subtotal			128	22.3%	572

The frequency of the term *diguo zhuyi* in the three periods increased progressively from 6, to 11, to 111. Remarkably, in the last period, the term

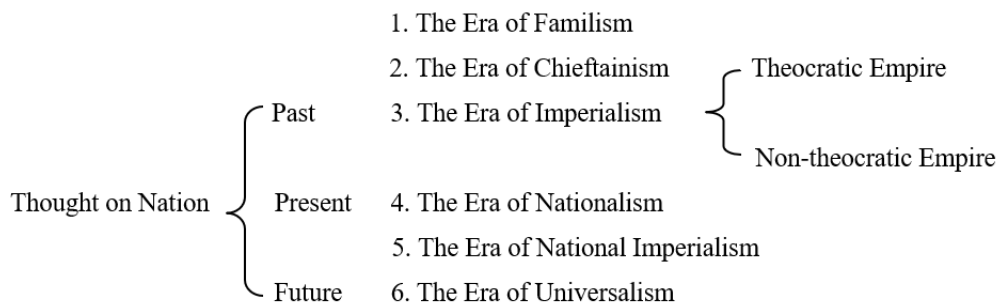


accounted for almost 40% of all “-isms” mentioned, which highlights the extreme preoccupation of thinkers at the time with imperialism. Moreover, the extremely high frequency with which the term appeared in the *Journal of Pure Critique* in 1901 mirrored the climax of its usage in Japanese materials.

Consider the following textual analysis. In Vol. 1, the term *zhuyi* (that is, an “ism” or doctrine) appeared in a specific context of “setting the bureaucratic establishment as doctrine;” in Vol. 2, “Richford delivered a speech on doctrine in Shanghai”. The term *diguo zhuyi* appeared for the first time in the translation of “The New Muailuo Doctrine of the Far East” (极东之新木爱罗主义), published in Vol. 2: “using this proposal to enable the United States and Britain to manage the universal new imperialism.”<sup>2</sup> The “New Muailuo Doctrine” is now known as the “Neo Monroe Doctrine”. This article was included in the column of “East News Translation and Compilation” and was translated by the Japanese Osu Tsurutarô. It can thus be regarded as a Chinese translation of Japanese materials, rather than a new term coined by Chinese thinkers. But based on the time when the word “*teikokusyugi* 帝国主义” first appeared in Japanese mentioned in the above section, we can see that the example of *Journal of Pure Critique* translated from Japanese was given at the same time. Expressions such as, “Others may say imperialism, or Jingoism, or Pacifism” began to appear in Vol. 13 in the following year (1899). Later, the following explication was given in Vol. 17, “The imperialists are those who are dedicated to opening up territories and expanding their own national power. The meaning can be interpreted as King Hui of Liang’s aim to ‘profit my state.’” Using the well-known example of King Hui of Liang helped Chinese readers understand the concept of “imperialism”. This is because what King Hui of Liang desired as “profits” were to regain his land as well as former reputation and prestige. As Chinese readers would have known, to Mencius, such petty profits only served the selfish interests of King Hui of Liang. On the contrary, Mencius argued that “kindheartedness and justice” should be extended to all the people in the world. Evidently, this particular reading of “imperialism” as it appears in Vol. 17 already betrayed a critical, disapproving undertone.

After Vol. 90 of the *Qingyi Bao*, discussions regarding “Statism”, “Nationalism” and “Imperialism” became increasingly frequent. Liang Qichao often made references to *diguo zhuyi*, rooting it in the notion of “nationalism”. In his article “Differences and Similarities in the Change

of 'Thought on Nation' (国家思想变迁异同论, *Qingyi Bao*, 1901, 95: 1), he included the following diagram of the "traces of past, present and future changes" in the thought on European nations:



Liang Qichao explained, "Nowadays, Europe and America have transitioned from nationalism to national imperialism, whereas Asia has moved from imperialism to nationalism". Moreover, in Europe, "nationalism started in the second half of the 18th century and experienced its heyday in the 19th century. National imperialism began in the second half of the 19th century, and its heyday is in the 20th century. Today's world is nothing more than the active arena of these two ideas." Liang Qichao later expounded on national imperialism in the second section of "On the New Citizen" (*Xinmin Shuo* 新民说) (*Xinmin Congbao* 新民丛报, 1902), "What are national imperialists? The strength of their people is sufficient within and has to be exposed on the outside, so they are eager to expand their power in other places and make them their own."

In particular, the long article "Imperialism" translated from Japan's *The People's Newspaper* (*Kokumin Shinbun* 国民新聞) and serialized in the "Translation Record of Current Affairs Comment" (*Shilunyilu* 时论译录) column, shows that the attention China's intellectuals paid to this doctrine was at least equal that of their Japanese counterparts – giving us insights into the processes of knowledge transfer between China and Japan. The original Japanese text published by *The People's Newspaper* was serialized from November 5th to November 23rd in 15 installments, with the *Qingyi Bao* publishing its translation in 4 instalments, which were respectively published in Vol. 97 (November 5 -7, 3 times) issued on November 11, Vol. 98 (November 9-12, 3 times) issued on November 21, Vol. 99 (November 13-16, 4 times) on December 1st and Vol. 100 (November 19, 21-23, 4 times). But on the Vol. 100 issued on December 11, Of the four

times, only one paragraph was translated in the last time. However, it is a fact that the Chinese translation from the Japanese newspaper were published in a very short time.

Later, in the article “About the Tendency of National Competition” (民族竞争之大势) serially published in *Xinmin Congbao* (No. 2-5), from February to April, 1902, Liang repeatedly touched on the notion of imperialism. He first explored its origin, “Since the Middle Ages, the British had been incompatible with Roman imperial government, so it left and became independent, which was the beginning of the nation-state. Therefore, their national imperialism was also in a leading position, and they learnt to properly deal with their dependent territory so they could control the world.” Then he analyzed the imperialism of various countries, stating that, “The discussion on imperialism has been touted across the country recently, including the ministers of the government, the critics of the political parties, the teachers of the schools, the reporters of the newspapers, and even the inexperienced younger generations, the market dealers, none of whom fails to mention and admire it.” This kind of treatment coincided with the situation in Japan around 1899, with Liang obviously having been strongly influenced by the articles of Tokutomi Sohō. In fact, Liang retained a positive attitude towards the preservation of the monarchy (coincidentally, as mentioned earlier, the early Japanese translation of Imperialism was “the throne of the emperor (帝位)”). Evidently, Liang displayed a certain positive attitude toward imperialism too.

With regards to the spread of imperialism at the time, Liang Qichao mentioned in his article “A Short History of Economics-Smith Adams Theory” (生计学学说沿革小史·斯密亚丹学说, 1902) that, “imperialism is prevalent today, and the people of all countries are engaged in undertakings backed by their governments so as to compete for world domination.”<sup>3</sup> And Yu Chen Zi said in Section 3 of *About the Tendency of World Economic Competition* (论世界经济竞争之大势) that, “imperialism is not only prevalent in various nations, but all politicians who engage in it and literati and officialdom who talk about it consider it as the norm.” (*Xinmin Congbao* No.11, July 1902) It can be seen that intellectuals at the time mostly embraced the ideology of imperialism.

In 1903, Wang Rongbao (1878-1933) and others compiled the *New Erya-Shiqun* (新尔雅·释群), interpreting *diguo zhiyi* as “one group

dominating various groups subordinate to it; this is called imperialism.”(by Mingquanshe 明权社, 1903: 70) Evidently, the concept of imperialism, which had entered China through Japan, was basically an adoption of the Japanese meaning, with most intellectuals at the time seeing value in imperialism.

#### IV. CRITICISM OF *IMPERIALISM*

*Imperialism* (1901), written by the socialist Koutoku Shusui, was an early critique of the militarism and aggression of Japanese imperialism. In 1902, it was translated into Chinese and published by Zhao Bizhen (1873-1956), becoming one of the most influential books in China's socialist movement. From July 1906 to October 1908, Zhang Taiyan (1869-1936) was the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Min Bao* (民报 The People's Journal), the official publication of Tongmeng Hui (Chinese United League) in Japan, strongly challenging reformists such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. In April 1907, Zhang helped establish “the Asiatic Humanitarian Brotherhood Association” in Japan with Indians such as Bolukhan and Poshi. This was the first anti-imperialist coalition of individuals from various weaker Asian nations exiled in Japan. “Anti-imperialism” was explicitly stated in the “Asiatic Humanitarian Brotherhood Association Charter” (亚洲和亲会约章) as the principal purpose of the movement: “We have examined the affairs of countries and decided to establish the Asiatic Humanitarian Brotherhood Association in order to protect our nations against imperialism. In the future, we will repel foreign invaders and bootstrap ourselves with self-reliance. The southeast groups will support each other, like a bunch of reeds shoring up one another. This is a confederacy of many people with different surnames who aim to mend relations that have been cut off for a long time. We aim to revitalize Brahman (Hinduism), Gautama (Buddhism), Confucianism, Lao Zi's Taoism and other ancient civilizations and traditions to save the world, and abandon the false morality of the wicked people in the West.”<sup>4</sup>

As the revolutionaries gradually deepened their understanding of imperialism, they soon spoke out forcefully against it. Zhang Taiyan directly referred to imperialists as “a band of robbers” in the *Preface Presented to Indians Bolukhan and Poshi* (送印度钵逻罕、保什二君序).<sup>5</sup> He also stated in *My Theory of Constitutionalism to Refute God* (驳神我宪政说,

1908), “To use words that make everyone happy today to cover up imperialism is like using the name of the people who pursue the concepts of impartial care in the Monist School to cover up its annexationism. If Mozi and Mencius had known about this, they would definitely have tied them up with red silk ropes and attacked them with thunder drums.”<sup>6</sup> Evidently, the author left no doubt about his perception that annexationism lies at the heart of imperialism.

This understanding of imperialism had also been reflected in China’s first modern dictionary *Ci Yuan* (辞源, 1915), but the criticism was obviously not yet strongly phrased:

It must take the opportunity to expand the territory and the scope of rights as its national strength allows. For example, the United States adhered to the Monroe Doctrine for generations, regardless of matters outside its own continent. However, it has recently adopted imperialism and gradually extended its influence abroad (*Ci Yuan*, 1915: 513).

After 1917, Lenin (1870-1924) in his book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (论帝国主义), referred to capitalism from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century as imperialism, which had reached the stage of monopoly. This represented the mature critique of imperialism.<sup>7</sup> The May 4th Movement in 1919 advocated anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism, calling imperialism one of the “three big mountains” burdening the Chinese people. *The Declaration of the First National Congress of the Chinese Kuomintang* (中国国民党第一次全国代表大会宣言) on January 23, 1924 stated, “The domestic warlords are in collusion with the imperialists, and the bourgeoisie also eye them greedily and want to carve up the remaining parts through taking action. As a result, the Chinese nation has been declining politically and economically.”<sup>8</sup> This sentiment makes it easy to understand how the overthrow of imperialism went on to become one of the goals of the Chinese revolution.

In the 1930s, the interpretation of *diguo zhuyi* in the first edition of *Ci Hai* (辞海, 1936) exactly mirrored this view:

The original word imperialism was derived from the Latin word *imperium*, referring to the rule of the Roman Empire and its military

policy. Later its meaning was extended to encompass the colonial expansion movement. Today, all those who use force and economic power to invade foreign countries and oppress weak and small nations to take advantage of the opportunity to expand their territory or sphere of influence, regardless of their state system, are called imperialists. Marxist scholars call this an inevitable result of the development of capitalism (*Ci Hai*, 1936: 475).

However, the later revised edition of *Ci Hai* (1979) made significant changes to this entry while heeding Lenin's dictate to reinterpret the historical trends of modern times. Even the definition of *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (现代汉语词典, The Commercial Press, 1983) we have at hand now states:

[Imperialism] (1) Monopolistic, parasitic, decadent, and dying capitalism is the highest stage of capitalist development. Its basic feature is that monopoly replaces free competition and forms the rule of financial oligarchy. Imperialists ruthlessly exploit the working people at home and pursue colonialism and hegemonic policies abroad. Imperialism is the root of modern warfare. (2) Refers to imperialist countries (*Modern Chinese Dictionary*, 1983: 230).

Originally, *diguo* 帝国 referred to capitalist countries, but in the 1970s, when China criticized the hegemonism of the Soviet Union, it called it a country practicing "social imperialism"; that is, socialism on the surface but imperialism in practice. The label of "imperialism" has thus come to be used flexibly so long as the power it refers to exercises any kind of hegemony.

## CONCLUSION

Although the term *diguo* ("empire") appeared in texts as early as the Sui Dynasty, its meaning was not yet clearly defined then, and it was only infrequently used thereafter. Japan adopted the characters for *diguo* (帝国) and scholars used it to translate the Dutch term for empire in the late 18th century. This translation then influenced the English-Japanese dictionaries of the 19th century, making the meaning of *teikoku* 帝国 be associated with "empire" more widely circulated.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the ideology of imperialism prevailed in Europe and America, with Japan unwilling to be left behind. After establishing a constitutional monarchy centered around the emperor, it proclaimed itself the “Greater Japanese Empire” in 1889 and gradually adopted imperialist policies. At the end of the 19th century, reformist intellectuals led by Liang Qichao translated and introduced the Japanese term for imperialism into Chinese and China’s intellectual circles. These reformers saw imperialism as one the dominant trends shaping the globe and argued that China should keep pace with it. In reality, however, the impact of imperialist expansion was soon infringing upon China’s interests. Compared to Liang and his followers, the revolutionaries headed by Zhang Binglin, influenced in particular by the socialist Koutoku Shusui, had a more prescient understanding of the bellicose nature of imperialism. In the early 20th century, they gathered representatives of various oppressed nations in Japan to uphold the banner of revolting against imperialism.

In 1917, Lenin argued in his *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* that imperialism as the highest stage of capitalist development inevitably triggers wars of aggression. Subsequent historical developments demonstrated the truth of this insight. Indeed, the Chinese revolution itself started with the dictum of overthrowing imperialism, that is, thoroughly exposing and criticizing the various monopolies and privileges of imperialism in China in order to achieve complete independence.

From a linguistic perspective, both the characters for “empire” (*diguo*) and “ism” (*zhuyi*) were classical Chinese terms used by the Japanese to translate Western modern concepts. The subsequent translations into Chinese took over the now well-defined meaning of the characters with just a little bit of delay. This kind of “Grab-ism” (*Nalai-zhuyi*) facilitated the rapid spread and popularization of the concept of *diguo zhuyi* in China, allowing China to respond in time to various ideological trends and philosophies that were surging at that time and had to be brought in relation with global developments.

#### Notes

Proofread by Daniel Canaris, Sun Yat-Sen University.

<sup>1</sup> The direct translation of “Imperialism” can be seen in that book *An English-Japanese Dictionary of the Spoken Language*, 3rd Edition, Hong Kong: Kelly & Walsh Ltd., 1904.

<sup>2</sup> *The Journal of Pure Critique (Qingyi Bao 清议报)* Vol. 2 was published on December 23, 1898.

<sup>3</sup> Liang Qichao's paper included in the second volume of *Yinbinshiwenjileibian* (饮冰室文集类编), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989, p. 244.

<sup>4</sup> It included in the *Zhangtaiyan's Selection* (章太炎选集) by Zhu Weizheng and Jiang Yihua, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1981, p. 429.

<sup>5</sup> Originally from *Minbao* (民报) No. 13, this paper is based on *Taiyan's Selection* (太炎文录别录), Vol. 2, Shanghai shudian, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Originally from *Minbao* (民报) No. 21, This paper is based on *Selected Works of Zhang Taiyan's Political Theory* (章太炎政论选集) edited by Tang Zhijun, Zhonghua shuju, 1977, p. 407.

<sup>7</sup> Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* was published in 1916, and this paper refers to the Chinese translation (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> It included in the *Sun Zhongshan's Selection* (孙中山选集), Vol. 2, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1956, pp. 520-531.

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