

The Concept of “Territory” in Modern China: 1689-1910

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Abstract: There are two frequent misunderstandings in the scholarship on modern China’s territorial transformation. First, the concept of *lingtu* 领土 (“territory”) is often seen as only developing after the 1911 Revolution, in opposition to the earlier concept of *jiangyu diguo* 疆域帝国 (“imperial frontier”). Second, *jiangyu* and *lingtu* are often confused and seen as basically the same concept at different historical stages. This essay takes the translation and dissemination of “territory” before the 1911 Revolution as a starting point to examine how the basic concept of *lingtu* developed from a translated term to describe spatial relations into an important semantic resource of a political movement. On one hand, in the negotiations leading to the Treaty of Nerchinsk and in the modern treaty system, the translation of “territory” formed a new conceptual space, centred on *lingtu*, which differed from the idea of the (imperial) “frontier” (*jiangyu*). The turn from *jiangyu* to *lingtu* was not a complete one; rather, part of the old concept was integrated into the new framework. On the other hand, the concept of *lingtu* also provided a semantic battlefield, and the battle was already opened before the revolution: the earlier ideas, diplomatic relations and national narrative already formed the basic concepts dominating discourses after the revolution.

Keywords: territory, concept, translation, modern China

I. INTRODUCTION

This essay takes the modern Chinese translation of “territory” as a starting point to discuss the tensions between history and reality, practice and perception in the concept of *lingtu* 领土. It first analyses how this concept first entered into usage during diplomatic negotiations and then traces its way through the treaty system, dictionary entries, and its role in political texts to understand how it became part of the modern Chinese conceptual framework of “territory”. There is not much research on this aspect by Chinese scholars; historians have often described the historical facts as a linear process in which “frontiers were transformed into territory” (疆域向领土转型), while political scientists have concentrated on the

formation of a modern “territorial-state identity of citizens” (公民对国家的领土认同) (see Zhou, 2016; Gao, 2010). None of them has touched on the formation of the concept of *lingtu* in the context of modern China.

II. THE TERRITORIAL TERMS IN THE TREATY OF NERCHINSK, 1689

The concept of territory in modern China originated in the context of diplomatic relations and it was used to speak about space. In 1689, however, when the Treaty of Nerchinsk was signed, China, ruled by the Manchurian Qing dynasty, still was not familiar with Western diplomacy and the language of international law; it also lacked the necessary cartographic tools and conceptual framework. Serving as one of the two “Latin translators” during the negotiation, the Portuguese Jesuit Thomas Pereira commented:

Perguntando-lhes de mais se sabião as **terras** que pedião; advertindo eu que na siencia manquejavão, ajuntando logo que o destrito que pedião de sul a norte era perto de 800 legoas (o que tinhamos computado pellos graos). Ouvindo ells, olharão pera huns e pera os outros e (Sebes, 1961: 270-271).

One of the key terms in the negotiations on the treaty was *di* 地 (“land”). The Qing envoys used the traditional spatial framework centred on the empire—*tianxia* 天下. The empire consisted of “the centre” (*zhongxin* 中心), “frontier areas” (*bianjiang* 边疆), and barbarian lands or “wilderness” (*manbuang* 蛮荒). Thus, before the envoy Songgotu departed on 13th June, he told the Kangxi Emperor:

尼布潮、雅克薩既系我屬所居地。臣等請如前議，以尼布潮為界，此內諸地，皆歸我朝。

Nerchinsk and Yaksa used to be **our vassals’ land** (*di* 地). We again suggest to your majesty that Nerchinsk could be the frontier. All the **places** (*di* 地) within should belong to us (Qingshilu, 1985: 543).

In the Chinese statements, *di* referred to specific localities like towns

and also to the tributary states of the Qing empire. On 22nd August, the Chinese envoy demanded that Nerchinsk, Yaksa and all their dependencies be assigned to the Qing empire, because they “pay tribute to China” (向中國納貢) (Qingshilu, 1985: 577; du Halde, 1735: 191). Thus, the Treaty of Nerchinsk, signed on 7th September 1689, included the following passage:

凡嶺陽流入黑龍江之河道，悉屬中國，其嶺陰河道，悉屬俄羅斯。惟烏第河以南，興安嶺以北，中間所有地方河道，暫行存放。

All the rivers or streams flowing from the southern slope of these mountains to join the Amur river shall belong to the Empire of China, while all the rivers flowing down from the northern side of these mountains shall be similarly under the rule of His Majesty the Czar of the Russian Empire. As to the other **places and rivers** (*difang hedao*) which lie between the Russian river Oud and the aforesaid mountains, the question of the jurisdiction over them is to remain open (Xi, 1966-1973: 40-41). (Article I)

The Russian delegates understood *di* in a rather different way. On one hand, they used new maps drawn by Dutch cartographers while they doubted the accuracy of the Chinese maps (Yoshida, 1980: 31-70; Baddeley, 1916: 214-215). On the other hand, the Russian envoy Fyodor Alexeyevich Golovin used the term *земля*, which referred to a more abstract idea of “territories” instead of specific localities (Русско-китайские, 1972: 538-608). Like the Latin *terra* in the official version of the treaty, it was usually used in plural (*земли, земля*), which also corresponded to the mother tongues of the Jesuit interpreters: *terras* in Portuguese in the case of Pereira and *terres* in French for François Gerbillon, another “Latin translator” during the negotiation (Frank, 1947: 265-270; Sebes, 1961: 223-271; du Halde, 1735: 189-199).

A second key term in the treaty of 1689 was *jie* 界 (“frontier”). The Chinese inscription on the boundary marker said:

將流入黑龍江之額爾古納河為界。河之南岸，屬於中國。河之北岸，屬於鄂羅斯。

The river Argun, which flows into the Amur, will form the

frontier (*jie*) along its whole length. All territory on the left bank is to be under the rule of the Emperor of China; all on the right bank will be included in the Empire of the Czar (Qingshilu, 1985: 578). (Article II)

In article IV of the treaty was stipulated:

分定疆界，两国猎户不得越过。

As the **frontier** (*jiangjie*) has been settled, no hunters from the two empires can pass (Xi, 1966-1973: 41).

In the *Kangxi Dictionary* (康熙字典, 1716), *jie* was not defined as a “border”, but as the end of the imperial frontier area (*Kangxi zidian*, 1922:760). Therefore, the Qing envoy’s usage of *jie* in 1689 also had to be understood within the framework of the tribute system. So, for example, although the treaty stipulated that the rivers Gorbitza and Argun formed the “frontier”, as the Khalkhas living on the other side had recently become a Chinese vassal, the Qing wanted to include them as part of their frontier (du Halde, 1735: 193-194). The existence of a frontier also did not imply the limitation of imperial space, but rather the separation of the scope of rule of oneself and of the other. This already required a certain idea of exclusivity, but it was still far from being identical with the understanding of the Russians.

The Russians used the term *граница*, which meant “a linear boundary between territories” and implied a clear division of rights, similar to the Latin *limites* and to the native language expressions of Pereira (*devizão das terras* by *limites*) and Gerbillon (*les bornes des deux Empires*) (Русско-китайские, 1972: 538-608; Frank, 1947: 265-270; Sebes, 1961: 223-271; du Halde, 1735: 189-199). The French *Dictionnaire universel* of 1690 explained *borne* as the division of properties by a mark. Furthermore, *borne* also denominates “what separates provinces and kingdoms”; in real life, these were large landmark stones. *Limites* (mostly used in the plural) thus referred to the borderlines, marked by numerous boundary stones (*bornes*), which define a piece of land and separate states or provinces from each other (see Furetière, 1690).¹

Looking at the spatial concepts in the negotiations between the Qing, Russians and Jesuits, one can distinguish two kinds of conceptual frameworks. The Russians and the Jesuits operated with the 17th century

European concept of territory: words like *границы*, *limites*, *bornes* etc. all expressed the understanding of territorial space by the new sovereign states. The Chinese framework, however, referred to a system of an empire and its vassal states; thus, the understandings of “land” and “frontier” differed substantially.

Nonetheless, the Treaty of Nerchinsk is especially significant for the entry of the concept of “territory” (*lingtu* 领土) to China. On one hand, the treaty manifested the emergence of the first borderline in modern China: at a time when the conception of a sovereign state and thinking in terms of equal diplomatic relations had not yet formed, the spatial demarcation of the scope of sovereignty already happened in practice. On the other hand, this practice of demarcation not only lacked the corresponding territorial awareness and understanding of international law, but also the necessary political concepts and terms. Although the territorial space had changed, its perception and the conceptual framework did not keep up.

III. THE TREATY SYSTEM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

When George Macartney came to China in 1792, Great Britain and the Qing dynasty still held two totally different views of their relations to other states: a hierarchical and inclusive concept of *tianxia* on the one side, and the concept of equal diplomatic relations between sovereign states on the other (Hevia, 1995: 23-25). Even though the Qing had to hand over a piece of their territory, namely Hong Kong, to the British with the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, it took a lot of international treaties in the 19th century until the conceptual problems, already exposed by the negotiations with the Russians in the 17th century, were beginning to be solved. It was not until the signature of the “The Twenty-One Demands” in 1915, that “territory” was translated for the first time directly as *lingtu* 领土.²

In the many treaties signed after the Opium Wars, the English term “territory” and the French term *territoire* (most treaties were drafted in one of these languages) began to enter into China, but their hasty translations continued to show the Qing government’s lack of an adequate conceptual framework to reflect the implications of diplomatic relations and international law.

In the Treaty of the Bogue from 1843, “Chinese territory” was translated as *difang* 地方, and the same is true for the Treaty of Tientsin

(1858), the Sino-French *Convention relative à la délimitation de la frontière entre la Chine et le Tonkin* (1887), and the Convention between Great Britain and China Respecting Wei-hai-Wei (1898). *Difang* was rather the equivalent of the English “place” or “location” and referred to the specific areas and locations affected by the treaties.

Another term used to translate “territory” was *tudi* 土地, or simply *di* 地, for example in Treaty of Wanghia (1844) between the U.S. and China, also in the Treaty of Tientsin (1858), the Sino-Russian Li–Lobanov Treaty (1896), and the Convention Between Great Britain and Thibet (1904). *Tudi* roughly corresponded to the English word “land” and referred to the state’s territory in a more general sense; furthermore, it implied a stronger degree of measurability and political allocation.

A third group of terms used for translation emphasized delimitation and exclusivity. In the *Traité de Paix, d'amitié et de commerce entre la Chine et la France* (1885) and the Boxer Protocol (1901) the French *territoire* was translated as *jingnei* 境内; in the *Convention complémentaire de commerce entre la France et la Chine* (1895) as *jienei* 界内; and in the Convention giving effect to Article III of the Convention relative to Burma and Thibet between China and Great Britain (1894) as *dijie* 地界. These translations appeared in passages dealing with concrete border delineations and management rights, as was also the case with *jiezhi* 界址, which was used in the context of “leasing” land, e.g. in the Lease Agreement between China and the German Empire (1898) and the Convention Between Great Britain and China Respecting an Extension of Hong Kong Territory (1898).

Apart from the translations of treaties, the process of demarcation also played a role in changing the framework of territorial concepts. For example, the terms “frontier” or *frontière* came to China through the demarcations agreed with the Russians and the French. In the Treaty of Aigun (1858), “frontier” was translated as *jiaojie* 交界, which already implied the demarcation between equal political units. In the Treaty of Tientsin of the same year, *bianjie* 邊界 was used to translate “frontier”. It is worth noting that in the translations of the *Convention de Tientsin* (1886) and the Convention between Great Britain and China relative to Burmah and Thibet (also 1886) the same term is used although Vietnam and Burma used to be vassal states of the Chinese empire. This meant that demarcations not only implied delimitations of territorial space, they also

indicated that former vassal states were beginning to be recognised as equal neighbour states. In the 1893 treaties on concessions and extraterritorial jurisdictions, the terms *jiexian* 界線 and *jiexi* 界址 as translations of “frontier” also referred to the scope of specific jurisdictions.

Furthermore, images of the “frontier” also appeared on the maps annexed to the treaties. For example, the 1858 Treaty of Tientsin included the following passage:

邊界既定之後，登入地冊，繪為地圖，立定憑據，俾兩國永無此疆彼界之爭。

Les deux Gouvernements nommeront à ce effet des délégués qui fixeront la ligne de démarcation (*bianjie xian* 邊界線) et conclueront là-dessus une Convention, qui sera annexé comme Article Séparé au present Traité. Des cartes (*ditu* 地圖) et des descriptions détaillés de la frontière (границ, *jiangjie* 疆界) seront dressés ensuite et serviront de documents incontestables pour les temps futurs (Mayers, 1902 : 103). (Article IX)

A treaty two years later supplemented:

地圖內以紅色分為交界之地，必須兩國欽差大臣畫押。

En exécution du même Article IX du Traité de Tientsin est confirmée la carte dressée à cet effet, et sur laquelle, pour plus de clarté, la ligne frontière (границная, *jiaojie* 交界) est tracée par un trait rouge et indiquée par les lettres de l’alphabet russe. Cette carte est signée par les Plénipotentiaire des deux Empires et scellée de leurs sceaux (Mayers, 1902 : 105). (Article I)

Therefore, in the treaty system of the 19th century, the new conceptual framework centred on “territory” began to form not only through the treaties, but also through the new maps coming from the West. The new spatial discourse not only included texts, but also images. It transformed the spatial order: towards the outside, China was forced to follow the Western way of establishing the legitimacy of its territorial space through negotiations on a basis of equality, border demarcations and the creation of maps, which dissolved the traditional imperial conceptual framework

of “centre – frontier – wilderness”. Towards the inside, starting with United States–Korea Treaty of 1882, China’s position as the suzerain state within the tribute system was not recognised any longer and, one after the other, the vassal states, similar to the Western countries, began to sign treaties as sovereign states. Despite the rapid breakup of the spatial order of the tribute system, the traditional understanding of the “frontier area” (*jiangyu* 疆域) did not suddenly disappear, but persisted on the conceptual level, which is clearly visible in the dictionaries compiled by Western missionaries in the 19th century.

IV. FROM MISSIONARY DICTIONARIES TO WASEI-KANGO³

Apart from the treaty texts of the 19th century, the new Chinese conceptualizations of territory also fed from two other sources: the dictionaries compiled by Western missionaries and the Japanese translations of Western books.

IV.1. Missionary Dictionaries

The early dictionaries frequently still contained ideas stemming from the concept of imperial order. Robert Morrison’s *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language* from 1815 uses *difang* to translate “territory” and *shudi zhi shiqing* 屬地之事情 (“affairs of the vassal lands”) to translate “territorial affairs”, just as Samuel W. William’s *English & Chinese vocabulary in the court dialect* from 1844 (Morrison, 1822: 428; William, 1844: 291). Paul Perny’s *Dictionnaire français-latin-chinois de la langue mandarine parlée* (1869) similarly translates *territoire* as *shudi* (“vassal lands”) (Perny, 1869 : 427). Other terms given in the dictionaries include *jing* 境, *yu* 域, *ji* 畿, and *feng* 封, which were all used to refer to specific localities within the empire. The Japanese Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 in 1884 translated “territorial” as *difang de* 地方的 (roughly “local”) and “territorial right” as (*wei*) *dizhu* (為) 地主 (“(be) the lord of the land”); the highest “lord of the land” was, of course, the “empire” (*huangji* 皇畿) (Lobscheid and Inoue, 1884: 1070)

Other dictionaries provided more options. Walter H. Medhurst’s 1842 *Chinese and English dictionary* translated three Chinese words as “territory”: *di* 地 (“locality” or “land” in a broad sense; *ge di* 割地 was supposed to mean “to take or cut off territory”), *yu* 域 (alternative translations given: “boundary, a country, a region”), and *feng* 封 (a fief with a clearly

demarcated jurisdiction: “a territory 50 miles square”) (Medhurst: 1842: 51, 54, 183, 186). In his 1847 version of the same dictionary, he gives even more possible translations like *difang* 地方, *jingrang* 境壤, *jingjie* 竟界, and *weiqi* 衛圻 (Medhurst, 1847: 1285). The dictionaries of William Lobscheid in 1866, Justus Doolittle in 1872, and George C. Stent all followed in the same manner (Lobscheid, 1866: 526, 1768; Doolittle, 1872: 486; Stent, 1874: 32, 39).

The terms of diplomatic relations and international law also appeared in the dictionaries of the 19th century, of course. Herbert Allen Giles’ 1892 *A Chinese-English Dictionary* translated *ditu* 地土 (“land” in a broad sense) as “territory” and provided a lot of possible related actions: *fan di* 犯地 (to invade or violate territory), *xue di* 削地 (to seize territory), *ge di* 割地 (to cut off territory), *bing di* 併地 (to absorb territory), as well as the phenomena of 鯨吞地方 (“to annex territory”), 地若瓜分 (“to divide up territory like a water-melon”), and 剪地求和 (“to give up territory and beg for peace”) (Giles, 1892: 163, 231, 346, 444, 621, 911, 1086). Almost all these expressions were related to the Sino-Western relations in the 19th century.

Some traditional Chinese ideas about the “frontier” were preserved in the dictionaries nonetheless, for example in William T. Morrison’s 1876 dictionary which translates “territory” as *bantu* 版圖; or in an *English and Cantonese dictionary* from 1907 which suggests translating it as *jiangtu* 疆土 (Morrison, 1876: 476; Chalmers, 1907: 557). Both terms had long been in use in China before the 19th century.

The general tendency of the dictionaries reflected the entry of the Western concept of territory into the Chinese context. On one hand, the concepts and terms of international law were translated into Chinese; border and land ownership questions continuously marked the contents of most of the missionary dictionaries up to George Carter Stent’s 1905 *A Dictionary from English to Colloquial Mandarin Chinese*. On the other hand, the explanations of “territory” moved more and more towards a political angle in certain aspects of governance and jurisdiction. From imperial concepts like *ji* 畿 and *huangji* 皇畿 to the term *guotu* 國土 in Yen Wei-Ching’s 顏惠庆 *An English and Chinese standard dictionary* of 1908, territorial questions increasingly were linked to the concept of national sovereignty. In the second entry, *guotu* 國土 was explained as: “a piece of

land under the dominion of a prince or state, lying at a distance from the parent country”. Traditional imperial terms like *shudi* 屬地, *diyu* 地與 were intertwined with new terms like *lingdi* 領地, *lingtu* 領土 in this dictionary (Yen, 1908: 2337). The latter then became the central concept for “territory” in Chinese.

IV.2. *Lingtu* as a Wasei-kango

The Chinese word *lingtu* 領土 was taken over from Japan since the character *ling* 領 had a special meaning in Japan. In 1867, Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 wrote in his *Our eleven treaty countries* (條約十一國記): America used to be “England’s territory” (英吉利の領分), “Although the Netherlands is small, it owns many territories (領地) in the world, Java is one of them.” The territory of Prussia has “two parts of the east and west” (領分の内東西兩小分) (Fukuzawa, 1867: 3, 5, 16).⁴

The same use of this compound *Ryōbun* 領分 can be seen in the 1869 *All the countries of the world for children written in verse* (世界国盡). But when the 1878 *Popular discourse on national rights* (通俗国権論) discussed extraterritoriality, the term 國土 was used again. The 1884 *Popular discourse on foreign diplomacy* (通俗外交論), in contrast, used “out of a government’s territory” 其領地の外 to describe the extraterritoriality 治外法權 “on another government’s territory” (他國の領分内) (Fukuzawa, 1869: 1; 1878: 18; 1884: 1-3).

These special usages are also reflected in the Japanese dictionaries. The 1866 *A pocket dictionary of the English and Japanese Language* (英和對譯袖珍辭書) by Hori Tatsnoskay 堀達之助 translated the English term “territory” as 領分, 國, and 地方; “territorial” was translated as 領分中 (Hori, 1866: 821). These translations were continuously used until the late 19th century. Translating in the other direction, from Japanese to English, James Curtis Hepburn provided lots of words in his *Japanese-English and English-Japanese Dictionary* (和英語林集成) from 1867 which he saw as equivalents of “territory” (*Ryōbun* 領分): *Ryō* 領, *Ryō-chi* 領地, *Ryō-nai* 領内 and *Ō-Ryō* 押領 (Hepburn, 1867: 342, 357, 358).

In Japanese, the term *Ryōdo* 領土 gained currency approximately in the 1880s. When Ōishi Masami 大石正巳 translated Herbert Spencer’s *The*

Study of Sociology (1873) in 1883, he translated “territory” as 州土; when two other scholars translated Spencer’s *Political Institutions* from *Principles of Sociology* (1882) in 1885, they already used 領土 (Spencer and Ōishi, 1883: 271-272; Hamano, 1883: 60).⁵ The Japanese translation of Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) in 1892 also translated “territory” as 領土 (Smith and Ishikawa, 1892: 175). When Inagaki Manjirō 稻垣滿次郎 published his *Policy for the East* (東方策) in 1891, he not only used 領土 in his descriptions of European wars, the term 土領 also figured on the maps he provided (Inagaki, 1891: 164, 173).

There are two indicators for the widespread use of the term 領土 in Japan. First, it was used in national textbooks like the 1897 *National Education: Introduction of the Constitution* (國民教育憲法大意), which introduced “territorial rights” (領土權); second, 領土 started to become a key term in the newspapers. The *Asahi Shimbun*, for example, started to publish headlines with it in 1897 and their numbers increased year by year (Hozumi, 1897: 27-30).⁶

V. THE POLITICS OF LINGTU BEFORE THE 1911 REVOLUTION

When Liang Qichao published his *Works on Western Politics* 西政叢書 in 1897, the Japanese word 領土 had already entered the Chinese language. In his political novel *Strange Encounters with Beautiful Women* (Jiaren qiyu 佳人奇遇), an Eastern minstrel and a Russian discussed the territorial question:

夫敝國領土雖小，亦已足矣，顧已不暇，奚遑更貪無用之土地于東方以重為煩累耶。且曠觀今古，少欲統一宇內，為世界之帝王者，叱咤百萬之虎狼，蹂躪他人之領土，夫復何恨，亦有成與不成也。

The territory (*lingtu*) of our state is small but adequate. We could barely handle our own affairs, let alone any territorial aggrandizement in the East to burden ourselves. Moreover, throughout history, few men would unify the earth, making himself the emperor of the entire world. Commanding millions of soldiers while trampling on others’ territories (*lingtu*), should there

be any more regrets? However, there will be success and failures (Liang, 1947: 173).

Liang had translated this novel from Shiba Shirō's original Japanese work and published it in the *Qingyi bao* 清議報 [The China Discussion] in 1898 (*Qingyi bao*, 1991: 55). The *Qingyi bao* was an influential modern journal and an important outlet for Chinese discussions on “territory”. These were nurtured by the political background of that time: the exploration of what a “modern state” was in the realm of knowledge and ideas, the crisis after the First Sino-Japanese War (the danger of China being “carved up like a melon” 瓜分危機), and the movement of “territorial preservation” (*lingtu baoquan yundong* 領土保全運動).

V.1. Territory and Sovereignty within the Conceptual Framework of the State

Chinese intellectuals started using the term *lingtu* in the newspapers and journals they published during their stays in Japan, mostly in articles which discussed international affairs and geopolitics translated from the Japanese press, in which it had already become a standard expression for writing about territorial questions. Furthermore, in translations of works on international law, like *Elements of International Law* (万国公法, 1864), and comments on diplomatic affairs, *lingtu* was often combined with terms like *zhuquan* 主權 (sovereignty), *zhimin* 殖民 (colonies), *zhivai faquan* 治外法權 (extraterritoriality) and *diguo zhuoyi zhanzheng* 帝國主義戰爭 (imperialist wars). Thus, it not only referred to descriptions of space, but also to specific political ideas. Liang Qichao, for example, wrote in the *Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報 in 1905:

(英)彼有強大之政府以盾其后，而我方嚴海禁，出疆者以海賊論，安望其一為援手也？君知不可敵，不得已乃以領土主權歸諸英，而僅自保其土地所有權，納租稅于英政府。

The English have a powerful government to support them while we banned maritime trade. All those who cross the frontier are considered pirates, how could they count on our help? Knowing they could not resist, they had to concede territorial sovereignty (*lingtu zhuquan*) to England while merely preserving the ownership to their private land. Then they paid tax to the English government

(Liang, 2018: v.5, 54).

It is quite clear that in the debates on the “body of the state” (*guoti* 國體) in the late Qing and early Republic, *lingtu* was already linked to “sovereignty” (*zhuquan* 主權) and that one began to distinguish it from private property rights. When Liang Qichao introduced Johann Kaspar Bluntschli’s theories in 1903, he pointed out: “Sovereignty (*zhuquan*) is rooted in the state (*guojia* 國家); without sovereignty, there is no state.” (Liang, 2018: v. 4, 197)

When Liang Qichao linked “territory” and “sovereignty”, this was, in fact, to get a hold on the concept of the “state” (*guojia*). Similarly, if one takes the *Qingyi bao* as a representative example, *lingtu* 領土, when not used in translations, most often appeared in intellectuals’ reflections on theories of the state. In 1899 the *Qingyi bao* published Bluntschli’s *Deutsche Statslehre für Gebildete* (1874) under the Chinese title *Guojia lun* 国家论 and this introduced the connection of “territory” and “state” in a systematic way to China, stating that territory was a necessary element in the composition of a state:

何謂國土，蓋民人有一定居住之地之謂也，有國土而后始得稱之曰國家……，故一言以蔽之，曰無國土則無國家。

What is territory (*guotu*)? It means the land on which a people have settled permanently. There needs to be a territory first, before one can begin to call it a state (*guojia*). [...] Therefore, in a word, no territory means no state (*Qingyi bao*, 1991: 948).

In the same manner, “sovereignty” was another necessary element. In the modern Chinese conceptual framework, *lingtu* (territory) and *zhuquan* (sovereignty) formed a state’s “body” (*ti* 體) and “spirit” (*shen* 神). In its “Explanation of the state” (*Shi guojia* 釋國家), the *Xin Erya* 新爾雅 (1903) said:

領土擴張，臣民增加，（國家）形體上之發達也。

Territorial expansion and the increase of population, both are development of a state’s body (Wang, 1903: 3).

In his *Guowen yuyuan jie* 國文語原解 from 1916, Liang Qichao wrote:

近世學者言國家之要素三：曰領土，曰人民，曰主權。

According to today’s scholars, there are three elements of the state: a territory, a people, and sovereignty (Liang, 2018: v. 9, 443-444).

The Chinese character *guo* 國 was said to already comprise this meaning: the element 口 supposedly represented the “people”, the element 一 the “land”, the element 戈 “sovereignty”, and the box around it the borders: “Thus it had determined the idea of territory” (蓋確定領土之觀念也).

As exemplified by Liang Qichao, the use of the term *lingtu* in the intellectuals’ journals also reflected another trend of the late Qing and early Republic: the “new words” (*xin mingci* 新名詞) equally were a product of the practice of diplomatic relations and the transformation of the empire; and they shaped a new understanding of the state, with territory as one of its elements. In the treaty system and via the dictionaries’ translations, the Chinese gradually took over the term *lingtu* as a core concept of a new framework which, at the same time, provided a new understanding of state and space. “Territory”, in Reinhart Koselleck’s sense, became as much an indicator of modern China’s history as it became a factor (Koselleck, 2011: 8).

V. 2. “Territorial Preservationism”

It was China’s difficult political situation around the turn of the century, facing both domestic trouble and foreign aggression, that propelled the further politicization of the concept of *lingtu*, up to the point of becoming an ideological “-ism” (*zhuyi* 主義). The external crisis mainly was the threat of China being “carved up” by foreign powers, which looked like a very real possibility after the First Sino-Japanese War. The ubiquity of terms like “carving up” (*guafen* 瓜分), “leased territory” (*zujie* 租界) and “spheres of interest” (*shili fanwei* 勢力範圍), which derived from the conceptual framework centred on *lingtu*, showed that the concept of “territory” had become firmly established in China and that political problems were discussed within this framework. The awareness of

questions of territory, of course, not only resulted from foreign translations and new terms, but also from the emotional response to the reality of having to cede territory and forfeit sovereignty as, for example, in the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895).

On 6th September 1899, the American Secretary of State John Hay dispatched a note to the major European powers, proposing an “Open Door policy”.⁷ Although in this note he only mentioned the Kiao-chao territory (controlled by Germany), contemporaries read this as “a transformation from divisionism and the doctrine of spheres of influence to territorial preservation under the Open Door policy” (瓜分主義、勢力範圍主義向領土保全門戶開放主義的轉型) (*Xinmin congbao*, 2008: 1813). “Territorial preservation” (*lingtu baoquan* 領土保全), in the sense of maintaining the territorial integrity of China, initially was a term used by the Western powers in treaties and diplomatic relations, but it was quickly introduced to the Chinese government. It came up, for example, in a conversation of Li Hongzhang with the Japanese ambassador Komura Jutarō about the Russian garrisons in North-eastern China in 1901:

李云：貴公使此次來華，深望諸事相助，伊藤侯近日起居何如？

小村云：我臨行之前日會見伊藤侯，伊囑候中堂并云，此次和議深望中堂為國宣勞，早速議妥，我政府及全國小民均願保全中國領土。故我來貴國，凡可相助者，無不竭力。

Li: We hope that you have come to China to assist us in our affairs. How is Itō Hirobumi [the Japanese Prime Minister]?

Komura: I met him before my departure. He sent his regards to you while instructing me to help you in this negotiation. We wish this could be settled as soon as possible. Our government and the whole nation want to preserve China's territorial integrity. Therefore, I will do my best to help during my term of service in China (*Qingji waijiao shiliao*, 1987: 2370).

The intellectuals, who were opposed both to the government and the Western powers, picked up this term, but used it to criticise imperialist schemes. In the essay *On China's Future and Our Citizens' Responsibilities* (論中國之前途及國民應盡之責任), published by students in Hubei province in 1903, it was written:

當庚子之役聯軍入京，此時以其餘力宰割中原，中國無以禦之也，而東西人士萬口同聲以保全領土開放門戶為政策，嘻！外人豈真有所愛於中國耶？何其狼子野心！

When the united army entered Peking in 1900, they used their massive force to ravage China, which could not defend itself. Now, both foreigners and Chinese call for territorial preservation and an Open Door policy. Ha! How could foreigners really love China? They have the ambition of wild wolves (*Hubei xueshengjie*, 1968: 320)!

A Refutation of the Absurd Talk of “Territorial Preservation” (駁正領土保全之謬說) said in 1908:

各國所以倡導此保全領土之說者，要不外擴張經濟之勢力範圍而已。

The reason why all countries promote territorial preservation is that they want to extend the sphere of their economic interest and nothing more (*Guangyi congbao*, 1908: 1-2).

Thus, “territorial preservation” became a term of criticism of and resistance against the Open Door policy and later turned into a popular term of political and social movements.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of *lingtu* also began to acquire an orientation towards the future and it became a part of modern Chinese patriotism. The frontier area of the old empire needed to be reframed: A future Chinese nation-state needed to preserve its territory for all eternity. When invaded by foreign enemies, the territory had to be defended; this also meant that the ancestral soil and the motherland had to be loved passionately:

人民愛其土地之心，即今日之所謂愛國心。

When the people have a spirit of loving their land, this is what today is called the spirit of patriotism (Wang, 1903: 5).

Therefore, after the First Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese tended to speak in more radical ways about “territory” and the corresponding

expressions were clearly oriented towards action and struggle. On one hand, territory became linked to political legitimation, so that the opposite of “territorial preservation” now was the “forfeiting of sovereignty and the humiliation of the nation” (*sang quan ru guo* 喪權辱國). Any view or policy regarding territory now either had to guarantee its continued existence or its expansion; the discourse on territory began to be dominated by expressions like “protecting the territory and defending the nation” (*shou tu wei guo* 守土衛國), “not giving up a single inch of territory” (*cun tu bu rang* 寸土不讓), “not tolerating invasions and violations” (*bu rong qin fan* 不容侵犯), and “sacred and indivisible” (*shensheng bu ke fen'ge* 神聖不可分割). On the other hand, the handling of any locality, any piece of land, and any border now could be seen as a problem related to the fate of the whole nation; the political elite, the intellectuals, and the proletarian masses seemingly had been assigned the historical mission of protecting the national territory together. So even if living far away, every individual now was supposed to be able to relate to any remote area and to be ecstatic about its gain or angry about its loss, as if the spirit of the nation could directly perceive changes in its spatial composition. Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 wrote in his *Explaining the Republic of China* (*Zhonghua minguo jie* 中華民國解) from 1907:

夫保全領土於歐人則何利?必其可取直取而代之耳。安用是煦煦子子者為耶?誠知地大物博，非須臾所能撫拾，四分五裂之餘，兵連不解，則軍實匱而內亂生，其言保全，非為人道亦所以自完耳。

What is the interest of the Europeans in keeping the territory intact? It is that, with things as they are, they can continue to get what they want by indirect means. So what is the need of petty humanity and righteousness? They know that the country is vast and that it cannot be conquered in a day. If the country was cut up, then one war would follow another. Deficient logistics and provisioning would cause the armies to fall apart and internal upheavals would follow once again. Their talk of preserving the integrity of the country is not because of their humanity, but because of self-preservation and nothing else (Zhang, 1997: 39).

Zhang Taiyan’s analysis of “territorial preservation” hinted at yet another aspect, namely the threat of domestic disorder and territorial disintegration. In the context of national reform, revolution and social liberation of the late Qing and early Republic, the gradual decline of central power allowed the frontier regions to challenge the transformation from “frontier” to “territory”. The intrusions of foreign powers and the resulting “frontier crisis” (*bianjiang weiji* 邊疆危機), regional alliances like the “Mutual Protection of Southeast China” (*Dongnan hu bao* 東南互保) in 1900, and the warlord era following the 1911 Revolution all threatened the unity and integrity of *lingtu*. Accordingly, “territorial preservationism” did not only oppose imperialism and colonialism, but an even more important mission was the maintenance of national unity. Therefore, the “maps showing current events” (*shiju tu* 時局圖) and the “mulberry leaf” (*sangye* 桑葉) or “begonia” (*qiuhaitang* 秋海棠地圖) maps—showing China with the borders of the Qing empire at its greatest extent—in the modern schoolbooks brought together territorial concepts with the national narrative; they were a derivative product of “territorial preservationism” that entered civic life via political education (Huang, 2005: 77-107).

Afterwards, *lingtu* began to be systematically integrated into the context of national and democratic revolution and became one of the key concepts in the debate on China’s fate and future. When Japan and Russia went to war on Chinese territory in 1905, this heavily provoked the Chinese. On 31st August, Sun Yat-sen declared while visiting the United States:

European possession in Africa which had hitherto been the bone of contention between the European Powers having now been well defined, a new field for territorial aggrandizement (增大領土) and colonial expansion (擴展殖民地) must therefore be sought. China long known as the “Sick Man of The Far East,” affords naturally such a field for the satisfaction of European ambitions (Sun, 1911: 8).

Already before the 1911 Revolution, Chinese politics had formed a future-oriented, controversial concept of territory which was committed to the idea of a complete and unified “territorial” space and resulted in a

rhetoric of self-defence. The views and practices of different political factions, however, were not only rooted in historical experiences, but also derived from an abstract, wholistic and integrated concept of *lingtu*. This concept also became a part of a new concept of the state that was developing at the same time; as the traditional view of the imperial “frontier” (*jiangyu*) had not entirely disappeared, however, it was also integrated in the new understandings and expressions of political space. The resulting “territorial preservationism” thus became a distinctive feature of modern Chinese nationalism.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the context of modern Chinese history, the concept of *lingtu* 领土 included a “semantic” and a “material” aspect. Although the word (or character combination) *lingtu* had existed before, it acquired a completely new meaning in a modernizing China. Territory became an issue for the first time in the negotiations with Russia at the end of the 17th century. Semantic changes accompanied changes in spatial relations, and spatial relations were partly determined by semantics: concept and reality could stand in a tense relationship of opposition. Then, in the 19th century, the rise of *lingtu* indicated the decline of earlier spatial concepts related to the empire and witnessed the birth of new concepts like “sovereignty”, “state”, and “border”. This not only changed the semantic resources available in public or private at the time, but, on a larger scale, also signified the formation of a new conceptual framework, new semantic fields, and even new ideologies. They formed the semantic basis for the “territorial preservationism” and “patriotism” of the 20th century.

Since the negotiations of 1689, the treaty system, the dictionaries, and political texts together formed the conceptual space of *lingtu* in modern China. On the one hand, one learned how to express territorial space in the interactions with the West; on the other hand, the new vocabulary reflected the transformation of the traditional empire under the pressure of Western powers. It was a process of adapting Western ideas on territorial space and, at the same time, a process of vassal states continuously disassociating themselves at the frontiers of the empire. During its last decades, the Qing empire already started to enter the spatial transformation of modernity.

The adoption of the Western concept of “territory” dissolved the

semantics of imperial times. In the new spatial rhetoric, China was externally on equal terms with the Western countries; internally, it detached itself from the hierarchical order of the tribute system and developed into a sovereign state with a delimited territory. However, before this modern transformation was completed, a revolution took place and the Republic (as well as the later People’s Republic) inherited the old empire’s territory and the related problems. The modern concept of “territory” (*lingtu*) did not completely erase the traditional concept of “frontier” (*jiangyu*); especially in daily language, part of the traditional idea of “frontier” continued to shape the understanding of *lingtu*. Thus, in the context of modern China, “territory” became a hybrid concept.

Notes

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¹ See the items “borne” and “limites” in Furetière, Antoine. *Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots françois tant vieux que modernes, et les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts*, Haye: A. et R. Leers, 1690.

² All the Qing dynasty treaties and agreements quoted in this article could be consulted in the database of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China, <http://npmhost.npm.gov.tw/tts/npmkm2/10010.html>.

³ Since *kango* 漢語 or “Han words” were the words made from the sounds of Chinese characters’ in Japanese, *Wasei-kango* or *wasei no kango* 和製の漢語 means “kango made in Japan”, namely Japanese words created from Chinese characters which then borrowed by the Chinese since the 19th century. Irwin, Mark. *Loanwords in Japanese*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2011, p. 6.

⁴ Fukuzawa, Yukichi. *Our eleven treaty countries* 条約十一国記. Tokyo: Fukuzawa’s 福澤氏蔵版, 1867, p. 3, 5, 16. All Fukuzawa Yukichi’s books can be consulted in <http://dcollections.lib.keio.ac.jp/ja/fukuzawa>.

⁵ Spencer, Herbert. Ōishi Masami, *The Study of Sociology* (2) 社會學. Tokyo: 是我書房, 1883, pp. 271-272. <http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/798493/1>. Hamano, Shijiro. *Political Institutions* (1) 政法哲學. Tokyo: Ishikawa Hanjiro, 1883, p. 60. <http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/783387>.

⁶ Hozumi, Yatsuka. *National Education: Introduction of the Constitution* 國民教育憲法大意. Tokyo: Wakaba Book Store 八尾書店, 1897, pp. 27-30. <http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/2387838>. As for 領土 in newspaper reports, see the Newspaper Clippings Collection in Kobe University Library, <http://www.lib.kobe-u.ac.jp/sinbun/e-index.html>.

⁷ see *Declarations by France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, and Russia accepting*

United States proposal for "open door" policy in China, September 6, 1899-March 20, 1900.

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