

“Dividing up the [Chinese] Melon, *guafen* 瓜分”: The Fate of a Transcultural Metaphor in the Formation of National Myth

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Introduction

The Mainland China master narrative of modern Chinese history, established by Fan Wenlan’s *Zhongguo jindai shi* 中國近代史 (Modern history of China) in 1947¹ and recycled to this day in schoolbooks, museums, TV shows, textbooks, and scholarly writings has it that during the late Qing the Powers (Great Britain, Russia, France, Japan, Germany, United States) had the intention to cut up China “like a watermelon” as they had just done with Africa, and that this was prevented by Chinese resistance motivated by an awakening patriotism and nationalism.²

This master narrative claims that the intention of the Powers, especially the United States, to cut up China is alive to this day, although the strategies might have changed. Given the increased prowess of the People’s Republic of China, backdoor techniques such as spreading ideas of democracy and rule of law or promoting “multi-coloured revolutions” have replaced outright military means. The presumable slices follow a north/south or

1 Fan Wenlan 范文瀾, *Zhongguo jindai shi* 中國近代史 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1951), 358. For present-day references, see for example, Guo Chunmei 郭春梅, “Qingmo weihu guojia yitong de sichao,” 清末维护國家一統的思潮 [The current of preserving the territorial integrity of the nation during the late Qing], *Zhongguo lishi bowuguan guankan* 2 (2002): 39–51, esp. 41. It should be mentioned that better informed opinions, especially with regard to England, are also heard, although in marginal outlets. See, Wang Yinchun 王銀春, “Shijiu shiji mo Yingguo dui Hua zhengce de lishi kaocha” 19世紀末英國對華政策的歷史考察 [A historical investigation of Britain’s China policy during the late nineteenth century], *Ningxia daxue xuebao (Zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 21 (1999): 67–70.

2 The “resistance” story has occasionally gone to the point of claiming that the Boxers prevented the cutting up of China like a melon in 1900. Mou Anshi 牟安世, *Yihetuan dikang lieqiang guafen shi* 義和團抵抗列強瓜分史 [History of the Boxers resisting the Powers’ partitioning of China] (Beijing: Jingji guanli chubanshe, 1997).

a coastal areas/inland division, unless they focus on particular areas such as Tibet, Xinjiang, or the South China Sea.

“Cutting up [a country like] a melon,” *guafen* 瓜分, was widely used between the 1890s and the 1920s. However, while the image of the watermelon remained potentially visible in the Chinese term *gua* 瓜, which is used in this meaning to this day, *guafen* had joined the cemetery of dead metaphors from which much of our conceptual language is derived. The metaphorical character of the expression was not highlighted through explicit markers such as [“X is like. . .”]. Before 1900, *guafen* was regularly used *in lieu* of an abstract concept, but political cartoons, paintings, plays, poems, and political essays after this date show that the concrete image of cutting up a melon could be revived, allowing for the pictorial representation of the agency in the cutting, the instrument used, the dividing lines, and the beneficiaries.

This study is part of a larger project in transcultural conceptual history. Conceptual historians have generally assumed that concepts are words, some, such as Reinhart Koselleck, one of the principal promoters of conceptual history as a scholarly field, going as far as to claim that conceptual history can only trace developments within a single language because the “uniqueness of any given language” makes concepts untranslatable.³ Both points, the notion that concepts only appear in single words and that they are untranslatable, are ill supported. First, concepts are articulated on a broad range of platforms beyond words. These range from metaphor to institution, from installation to composition, to, finally, silent action. Second, the transcultural migration of concepts on all these platforms, which goes back to the beginnings of human language, has intensified since the nineteenth century to the point that all modern vernaculars have come to share a large set of them as a kind of invisible Esperanto with local and individual shades of meaning and application. An earlier part of this project, the introduction of which also sketched the controversies summarized here and provided some of the key references, investigated the translingual and transcultural migration of the conceptual metaphor of a nation “asleep” and “awakened.”⁴

3 Reinhart Koselleck, “Drei bürgerliche Welten. Zur vergleichenden Semantik der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft in Deutschland, England und Frankreich,” in R. Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006), 413.

4 Rudolf G. Wagner, “China ‘Asleep’ and ‘Awakening.’ A Study in Conceptualizing Asymmetry and Coping with It,” *Transcultural Studies* 1 (2011): 4–140.

The present study goes a step further. It will probe the ways in which a local Chinese metaphor that translated a legal concept in international law became part of the latter's larger systemic context; deal with the methodological issue of the relationship between abstract and metaphorical concepts; explore the intentions and reach of the historical actors who were promoting this metaphorical concept as accurately capturing China's impending fate; sketch the efforts of turning the *guafen* narrative into a dominant discourse for advocacy purposes by reviving the metaphorical meaning in visual, literary, and stage representations so as to win broader audiences for the political agenda that saw China in danger of being cut up, and discuss the argumentative adjustments made by the promoters of this lively vision of the danger facing China when history failed to live up to their premonitions. Last but not least, the study will venture beyond a decontextualized history of the meaning of a concept to explore how it is to be explained that in 1912 the country was able, at its moment of greatest weakness, to move from empire to republic with its largest ever territory intact. In a critical departure from the master narrative that bestows all the patriotic praise to the reformers and revolutionaries who warned about the danger of a partition of China, this study will assess the relationship between the *guafen* narrative and the historical reality of the "victor's dilemma" as well as the Qing court's use of it.

Origins: *Guafen* as a translation of the concept of the "partition" of Poland

Guafen 瓜分, "watermelon-cutting," has been used since Chinese antiquity as an unmarked metaphorical concept for dividing up. These uses were rare. In the entire eighteenth century collection of Chinese transmitted texts, the *Siku quanshu*, only about 130 occurrences of *guafen* will be found, and this includes a large overlap through allusions to the same two or three stories. None of the uses marks *guafen* as a metaphor by inserting a "this is like." To avoid the awkwardness of creating a verb "watermelon-cutting," however, I will use "cutting up like a melon." During the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), it occurs as a term for the neighbours' dividing up the territory of a state among each other. The state disappears with the "slices" being inserted into slices into the

neighbours' own territory.⁵ The description might be graphic, but it carries no value judgment. A watermelon is a cultivated plant like a state and it does not have an intrinsic claim to stay intact. It even seems predestined to be divided up as it shows potential lines for division on its rind. In other cases, *guafen* is used, again without opprobrium, to describe a ruler's assigning land to meritorious ministers or to their children, or for dividing a charitable association's annual collection of contributions among people suffering from a natural disaster.⁶ However, it also appears in reports about robbers dividing up their booty.⁷ At the other end of the spectrum, it was used to describe the dissolution of the territory into competing states, a process perceived as distressful. Even in such references, however, *guafen* is an abstract process, and very rarely an individual is charged with the responsibility for it. There is, as far as I can see, not a single reference in pre-1800 Chinese sources to an outside power dividing up China like a melon. Historically, however, the territory covered by China today was for most of its history not under a unified rule, and there are cases during the Six Dynasties and between the Tang and Yuan dynasties when outside powers such as the Tuoba, Liao, or Xixia controlled parts of what previously had been under unified rule in separate state formations. A historical sketch of the *guafen* of China from someone in the state of Jin in the fourth century CE who signs as a "sojourner" survives: "But once it came (from the hallowed Three Dynasties, R.W.) to the six states (of the Eastern Zhou) down to our time, the overall stability of people's pursuits went awry, and efforts at cutting up (the country like) a melon were on the rise (with the effect) that the farmer could not peacefully go about his ploughing, and the official could not live by his salary."⁸ As a sign of the general decay of the polity, internal controversy led to the country's being cut up.

5 "The states will avail themselves of Qin's wrath and take advantage of Zhao's weakness and melon-cut [Zhao]," *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 [Warring states strategies], Zhao 趙, section 3. Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–169 B.C.E.) writes in his *Xinshu* 新書 [Reform writings], ch. 1, about "melon-cutting the country to make kings of meritorious officials." In none of the existing cases, this is explained as being a metaphorical expression.

6 Yu Sen 俞森 (19th cent.), *Huangzheng congshu* 荒政叢書 [Collection of works on disaster relief] (n. p., 1843), juan 10b.

7 Memorial by Zongshi yingyuan 宗室英元 in *Jingbao* 京報 [Peking gazette], reprinted in *Shenbao* August 6, 1873. "Songgun shouchuang" 訟棍受創 [Getting wounded for instigating a lawsuit], *Shenbao* September 19, 1873.

8 "爰及六國至於末代，全國之業傾，瓜分之務起，農夫不得安其耕，爵士不得食其祿，" Qiao juren sensi jingyi 僑居人桑梓敬議, quoted in *Tongdian* 通典 [Pervasive record], juan 68.

Grammatically, *guafen* translates as “the cutting up of a watermelon” with the object *gua*/melon first and the verb *fen*/divide, thereafter, but it is most often used as a composite verb that is preceded or followed by an object. This transforms the noun melon into an adverb, resulting in “melonwise cutting up” of a territory or “melonwise dividing up” of a sum of money, and it opens the way for the nominalization of the verb *fen*, divide, to get to “the melonwise cutting up of” an object.

Until modern times, *guafen* was one of the many more or less “dead” metaphors that have entered all common languages as abstract terms with their metaphorical origin mostly forgotten. In our case, this is evident from *guafen* being paired with synonymous metaphors to highlight a common conceptual core. Examples are *guafen luanqie* 瓜分爨切 (cutting up like a melon and carving up like meat)⁹ *guafen douli* 瓜分豆離 (cutting up like a melon and separating like soybeans), or *guafen fulie* 瓜分幅裂 (cutting up like a melon and ripping apart like a piece of cloth).¹⁰ These synonymous metaphors share the same grammatical structure and their pairing of two utterly different processes that overlap in one key feature shows the effort to arrive at a truly abstract concept without leaving the realm of metaphorical concreteness and without creating an artificial new term. However, as we shall see, the metaphorical value of *guafen* was still visible enough to be rediscovered in modern times.¹¹

Although there are references in the Chinese sources to states being divided up by neighbours or through internal struggle, no discussion has come down to us indicating how the legitimacy of such a partition was treated in inter-state relations. Such a discussion would not have to be based on some form of formalized international law agreed upon by the states involved. As W.A.P. Martin, the Chinese translator of Wheaton’s

9 Yuan Shansong 袁山松, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 [Record of the Later Han (lost)], quoted in *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 [Classified collections of the arts and writing], juan 12, section Diwang 帝王 [Rulers], 2.

10 Zhang Shao 張紹 (Tang Dynasty), “Chongyouguan” 冲佑觀 [Chongyou Temple], *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 [Complete poems from the Tang Dynasty], # 887: “The four seas and the nine continents are cut up like a melon, torn apart like a piece of cloth.” 四海九州, 瓜分幅裂。

11 Actually all such “dead” metaphors retain some form of life that might be rekindled through an explicit exploration of the meaning and historical context. In the case of Chinese writing, the metaphorical meaning might be directly visible as in the case of the watermelon in *guafen*, it might be the metaphorical explanation of a word hidden in the components of a Chinese character as assumed by the widely used second century CE *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 [Explaining words by analyzing the characters], and it might be deeply hidden under a phonetic loan. For the wide-ranging discussion of live and dead metaphors in European languages, see Cornelia Müller, *Metaphors Dead and Alive, Sleeping and Waking. A Dynamic View* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 2–8.

International Law, argued already in the 1860s, interstate relations during the Spring and Autumn period (771–476 B.C.E) were governed by a shared understanding of certain rules referred to in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 [Mr. Zuo's transmission (Warring States)] as "good usages," *haoli* 好禮,¹² such as the immunity of diplomatic envoys or the binding power of contracts. These rules were enforced through a collective ostracism or punishment of the offender.¹³ However, as Martin observed, "no formal text-book containing the rules which for so many centuries controlled this complicated intercourse has come down to our times."¹⁴ Partition was not covered separately as an item by Martin, possibly because it occurred too rarely. The twelve states of the Spring and Autumn period went back to Zhou Dynasty fiefs. This common background for all but the state of Qin established a shared understanding that their existence as states was guaranteed. While we do not have records of successful or failed partitions for this early period, there are several cases where small and weak states (such as Lu) successfully defended themselves against neighbours' attempts to grab territory from them by invoking their originally having been established within these borders by the Zhou dynasty. They were signalling in this way that this land-grabbing was against the agreed-upon good usages. While quite a few of these customs of international relations remained active during the succeeding Warring States period, the common understanding of the right of the different states to exist was considerably weakened and territorial integrity was mostly secured by alliances.

Beginning the modern career of *guafen*: The partition of Poland in the Chinese discussion

Guafen started a new life in modern times both in terms of the sheer quantity of its uses and the depth of the discussion about it. The database of policy-related texts from 1820–1930 that was created by Jin Guantao

12 *Zuozhuan*, Duke Xi of Lu, 9th year.

13 W. A. P. Martin, "Traces of International Law in Ancient China," *The International Review* XIV.1 (January 1883): 63–77. This paper goes back to his talk at the Congress of Orientalists in Berlin in 1881. The first articulation of this idea, however, is in his English-language preface to his 1864 Chinese translation of Henry Wheaton's *Elements of International Law*, see Rune Svarverud, "The Formation of a Lexicon of International Law, 1847–1903," in *Mapping Meanings. The Field of new Learning in Late Qing China*, edited by M. Lackner, N. Vittinghoff (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 526.

14 Martin, "Traces of International Law," 66.

and Liu Qingfeng¹⁵ has nearly 3000 occurrences between the 1840s and 1920s. A look at the database for the *Shenbao* newspaper, which covers the years 1872–1949 and is not included in the Jin Guantao/Liu Qingfeng database, shows 1200 occurrences before 1930. The vast majority of such occurrences in the first database, which is privileging writings by reformers, refers to state territories, while in *Shenbao* reportages and the *Peking Gazette* reprinted daily in the *Shenbao* it often refers to robbers dividing their booty and is only very rarely used for the national territory on the paper's editorial page.

Guafen owes this ascendancy to its being used as a legal category to translate the Western concept of “partition” or “Aufteilung.”¹⁶ This happened first in sections dealing with Poland in the early Chinese-language descriptions of world geography. In this form it is a translation term that uses the binomial metaphor “melon division” available in Chinese to render a foreign concept. As there were many words in Chinese available for “dividing up,” it became dominant in this function in a gradual process. It had an advantage over other binomial expressions by being widely known, and over single-character expressions by being usable both as a noun and a verb. Since this binomial was not newly coined, *guafen* is not listed in any of the standard handbooks of modern Chinese terms of foreign origin, even though it is a translation term. While it basically follows the same logic as other translations such as *geming* 革命 for “revolution”¹⁷ or *yundong* 運動 for “movement”¹⁸—namely specifying an older content through a new meaning and inserting the newly created term into an increasingly internationally shared conceptual system—*guafen* is unusual due to its metaphorical character. While originally its use

15 Zhongguo jindai sixiang yu wenxue shi 1830–1930 zhuanke shujuku, 中國近代思想與文學史 1830–1930 專業數據庫 [Specialized database of modern Chinese history of thought and literature, 1830–1930], http://dsmc1.nccu.edu.tw/d_host_e.html. This database is not open access, but the organizers respond to requests.

16 No abstract Chinese noun seems to have been available as an alternative at the time. It was only since the early twentieth century that the ending *hua* 化 began to be used for transitive English nouns ending in -tion, which would have produced a calque. By this time, however, the partition-*guafen* link had long stabilized.

17 See Chen Jianhua 陳建華, “Geming” de xiandaixing. Zhongguo geminghua yukao lun “革命”的現代性. 中國革命化預考論 [The modernity of “revolution”. Preliminary essays on the revolutionization of China] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000).

18 See Rudolf G. Wagner, “The Canonization of May Fourth,” in *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital. China's May Fourth Project*, edited by Milena Doleželová-Velingerová (Cambridge: Harvard Asia Center, 2001), 69–94.

was due to a lack of a suitable noun in Chinese,¹⁹ its metaphorical character ended up fostering lively and emotional reactions among the broad public.

"Partition" as a legal term has its origin in European private inheritance and estate law. It was first applied in international law when state territory and the private property of the ruler were not yet separated. As a consequence, treaties of partition were made between sovereigns, most famously the Treaties of The Hague (1698) and Utrecht (1700).²⁰ The signatories took apart the Spanish monarchy, assigning substantial parts of its original territories first to the Prince of Bavaria and after his death to the grandson of Louis XIV.²¹ By the late eighteenth century, however, sovereignty and territorial integrity had become associated with the nation-state and the ability of rulers to dispose of their lands as private property was disputed. The tripartite division of Poland between the Romanovs, the Hohenzollerns, and the Habsburgs late in the eighteenth century, which had led to the disappearance of the Polish state (until it was eventually reconstituted in 1919) was an important battleground in this controversy. The partition had also led to an extensive European debate with luminaries such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, and Gabriel Bonnot de Mably participating on different sides. It eventually occupied many sessions of the Vienna Congress after the defeat of Napoleon who had restored the country for a short while. Eventually, it was widely condemned by diplomats from countries not involved, by political commentators, as well as by a new crop of people who were specializing in the development of a system of international law. The Polish partition was already denounced at the time in political paintings. These also reached wider audiences

19 Max Black defined this function as catachresis, "the use of a word in some new sense in order to remedy a gap in the vocabulary," although he did not deal with translation. Max Black, *Models and Metaphors. Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2nd edition, 1965), 33.

20 Brendan O'Leary, whose own agenda is tied to another state that was partitioned, Ireland, writes: "pre-modern dynasties [. . .] treated lands as real estate, and their peoples as herds of human capital; thus, in feudal and patrimonial regimes, 'partition' had no political meaning outside of estate law; and land divisions were not the subject of debates over their national public legitimacy." Brendan O'Leary, "Analysing partition: Definition, classification and explanation," *Political Geography* 26 (2007): 888. He refers for his definition to the authority of another writer focused on the Irish question, N. Mansergh, "The prelude to partition: concepts and aims in India and Ireland," in *Nationalism and independence: Selected Irish papers*, edited by D. Mansergh (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 32–33.

21 Henry Wheaton, *History of Law of Nations in Europe and America from the Earliest Times to the Treaty of Washington 1842* (New York: Gould, Banks & Co., 1845), 85–87.



Fig. 1: “The Troelfth Cake/Le Gâteau des Rois,” Bilingual copper print by Noël Le Mire after a painting by Jean-Michel Moreau le Jeune, published by Robert Sayer, London, Fleet Street, 1773. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

through copper print reproductions, which were quickly banned in several European countries (figure 1).²²

Moreau le Jeune describes the country with the metaphor of a cake. The goddess floating above with her double trumpet is PHEME (Fama), who trumpets the scandal of this partition to the world. The Polish king (second from left) desperately tries to hold on to his crown and the small segment of the original Poland that was left to him, but his lack of agency in the process is evident as none of the rulers of Austria, Prussia, and Russia is taking notice of him. The first two look at PHEME, concerned with their renown, but the Russian ruler determinedly looks away. In the caption, Moreau le Jeune verbally already linked the map with the metaphor of the “gâteau de rois,” a delicacy only fit for kings, but his painting does not yet depict

22 “The Troelfth Cake,” Wikipedia entry. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Troelfth_Cake [Accessed on 10. January 2017]. The information given here is based on an entry for this print in the Warsaw National Museum.

the map as a cake. The map/cake association, however, quickly became part of an international visual language that illustrated the concept of partition. With its polemical edge associating the territorial greed of Poland's neighbours with a craving for delicacies, it went beyond the intrinsically neutral "partition" by articulating legal objections by visual means.

The scandal of the Polish partition quickly made it into works on history, geography, and law and their Chinese translations or summaries. Protestant missionaries had, from their earliest days in Chinese-speaking environments, started to introduce "world history" with books and articles in Chinese.²³ This was part of the "useful knowledge" which they set out to spread, along with Christianity, throughout China.²⁴ A first outline of the process of the Polish partition in Chinese appears in Robert Morrison's sketch of world history (before 1834). Morrison blames Empress Catherine II of Russia for

sending her favourite to take possession of Poland and arresting the old ruler while also inciting the Greeks to rebel against the Ottoman Empire so as to push back Islam. She then joined with Austria and Prussia to divide up its [Poland's] territory.²⁵

使其據臣波蘭國，拘其舊主，且激希臘人叛土耳其以抑回教。遂與東國、波斯兩國分其土

23 Several studies have sketched their contribution as well as the role of these works for the Chinese world geographies that came out since the 1840s. Still the best overall study is Chang Hsi-t'ung (張錫彤), "The Earliest Phase of the Introduction of Western Political Science into China," *Yenching Journal of Social Studies* V.1 (1950): 1–30. For a recent bibliography, see Jessie G. Lutz, "China's View of the West. A Comparison of the Historical Geographies of Wei Yuan and Xu Jiyu," *Social Sciences and Missions* 25 (2012): 35–38. Neither of these studies mentions the partition of Poland.

24 In 1834, the early Protestant missionaries set up the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China. It was modeled on the American and British societies of this type, which aimed at introducing useful knowledge among the local lower classes through inexpensive publications.

25 Malixun 馬禮遜 [Robert Morrison], *Waiguo shilüe* 外國史略 [A sketch of the history of foreign countries], in *Xiaofanghuzhai yudi congchao zaibubian* 小方壺齋輿地叢鈔再補編 [Second sequel of geographical excerpts from the Small Square Gourd Studio], edited by Wang Xiqi 王錫祺 (Shanghai: Zhuyi tang, 1900), 42. Morrison's text is not mentioned in A. Wylie, *Memorials of Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1867), it is not in the Morrison Archive at SOAS in London, and I have not found information on an earlier print. As it mentions events in the 1840s, but Robert Morrison had died in 1834, Zou Zhenhuan argued that this 1900 print must be based on an edition supplemented by Morrison's sons. See Zou Zhenhuan 鄒振環, "<Waiguo shilüe> ji qi zuozhe wenti xintan" 《外國史略》及其作者問題新探 [A new investigation of *A sketch of the history of foreign countries* and its author], *Zhongshan daxue xuebao (Shehuikexue ban)* 48.5 (2008), 100–108. It is impossible to prove that these comments on Poland were part of Morrison's original draft, but they most likely were as these events occurred well before his death.

A few years later, the Pomeranian evangelical missionary Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851) devoted an entire separate section to the by then non-existent “state of Poland.” Writing in a very emotional language, he stressed that the partition was the result not of the rapacious greed of the neighbours but of the endless internal squabbles that ended up in a dysfunctional Polish polity. As he himself had grown up in nearby Pomerania, he might have had some first-hand knowledge. Gützlaff wrote that after the Polish state had first been set up,

the people chose a ruler, but the nobility abused its powers, oppressed the lower classes and made them into slaves [. . .] so that the people resented their rule. When the nobility came to their Diet to choose a new ruler, they got into such a struggle that in the end no decision was made. When the neighbouring states took advantage of this situation and occupied the country, the people were not able to stop them. In this way, Russia, Austria, and Prussia had their will and during the Qianlong period became the overlords over this state with each snatching parts of the country’s provinces. Patriots raised troops for a life-and-death struggle (a reference to the 1792 war with Russia and the 1794 uprising led by Tadeusz Kościuszko, who had returned to Poland after taking part in the American War of Independence, R.W.), but were not able to overcome the enemy. They had to submit to foreign rulers and even the name of this people disappeared.²⁶

民擇王也。惟五爵弄權，磨難下民，以為奴也 [. . .] 故此其民不悅其上憲也。五爵合會擇王之際，太爭論，心意終不定矣。鄰國乘勢，占國，而百姓擋不住之也。如此鄂羅斯、奧帝哩亞、破魯西等國立志，乾隆年間霸其國，各人搶諸省數分焉。忠民發兵效死戰，而不勝國敵矣。必須歸他王，連其民之名也亡矣。

Gützlaff clearly sides with the Polish struggle for what was still a very new notion at the time, national sovereignty. The principal cause for Poland’s disappearance in his narrative, however, lies within the country: it is the reckless attitude of the Polish nobility towards the common people, the internecine feuding, and the resulting unwillingness or inability of the people to fend off the foreign powers. The neighbouring powers, he writes, were simply “taking advantage of the situation,” *chengshi* 乘勢, within

26 (Karl Gützlaff), *Gujin wanguo gangjian* 古今萬國綱鑑 [Outline of all states past and present] (Singapore: Jianhua shuyuan, 1838), chapter 19, 87b–88a. The text is accessible at the Spanish Digital Library <http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?pid=d-3986826>, [Accessed on 25. January 2017]. The identification of the author is based on Wylie, *Memorials*, 60. As opposed to most other segments, this sketch of Polish history had not been previously published in the journal Gützlaff edited, the *Dongxiyang kao meiyue tongji zhuan* 東西洋考每月統計傳 [Monthly summary of events east and west (original English title: *The Chinese Miscellany*)].

Poland, but are not described as intrinsically aggressive. After Napoleon had restored Poland, however, the Poles were not able to hold on to it, so that by 1814, the Vienna Congress returned the country to the control of the neighbours with some stipulations such as that Emperor Alexander I was to grant the Poles representation and freedom of the press. Gützlaff continues:

When later (in the November 1830 uprising, R.W.) the (Poles) rebelled and confronted them (Russia) in battle with a courage full of righteous spirit, they showed bravery and high spirit and attacked the Russian despot. Unfortunately, they were routed and the Russian administrator took advantage of the situation to oppress them, intimidating them with the threat of death. The people's distress under this tyrannical government could not have been worse than at this time. This has continued, and there was nothing that could be done, even being ready to die did not remove this [tyranny]²⁷

後反叛對壘交鋒，懷義氣之雄心，胆壯氣豪，征鄂羅斯霸皇帝。不幸披靡奔走，且鄂羅斯總督加乘勢迫脅，威逼致死。民之憔悴於虐政，未有甚於此時者也。既世守也，非身之所能為也，效死勿去矣！(Punctuation in original)

Although the two books mentioned came out in Southeast Asia, they did reach their intended audience as the information they provided showed up in publications by Chinese authors of world geographies on the mainland since the 1840s.²⁸ Morrison and Gützlaff both used narrative rather than conceptual language for Poland's partition, with the first simply using *fen* 分 “divide” and not *guafen*, and the second speaking of the

27 (Karl Gützlaff), *Gujin wanguo gangjian*, ch. 19, 87b–88a. In an 1850 publication on world history, Guetzlaff came back to the same arguments about the internal causes. (Karl Gützlaff), *Wanguo shi zhuan* 萬國史傳 [History of all states] (N.p., 1850), chap. 29, 36b; chap. 34, 41 a–b. In another section of this later work, he is dealing with the role of the Catholic/Protestant divide in the partition, chapter 39, 46b. In still another, he praises Czar Alexander as a model ruler, whose “harsh suppression of Poland and subduing the rebelliousness of this people” turned out to be a possible godsend because the Polish people “appreciated him” but sadly he did not continue on a way to progress, chapter 41, 50b. Gützlaff disagreed with Morrison's harsh condemnation of Catherine, saying she was superbly intelligent, loved the Russian people although she was a foreigner, and that she reformed customs, chapter 39, 46b. The text is accessible as <http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/resolve/display/bsb11024447.html>, [Accessed on 12. January 2017]. The identification of Gützlaff as the author is based on Wylie, *Memorials*, 62.

28 Although the early Chinese mainland authors of world geographies such as Xu Jiyu, Wei Yuan or Liang Tingnan hardly ever mention their sources, the *Dongxiyang kao meiyue tongji zhuan* from which most of the Gützlaff's *Gujin wanguo gangjian* had been taken, is among their principal points of reference. See Huang Shijian 黃時鑑, “<Dong xi yang kao meiyue tongji zhuan> yingyinben daoyan” <東西洋考每月統計傳>影印本導言 [Introduction to the reprint of *Monthly Summary of Events East and West*], in Ai Han zhe 愛漢者 (Karl Gützlaff), *Dongxiyang kao meiyue tongji zhuan* 東西洋考每月統計傳 (reprint) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 25–27.

neighbours' "grabbing parts," *qiang fen* 搶分, of the territory. Their use of language signals that "partition" had not yet jelled—at least for them—into a fixed term for an infraction of international law, although both of them condemned the partition. No connection was made between Poland's fate and that of China.

By the time Gützlaff's first-mentioned book was printed in Singapore, Hugh Murray's *Encyclopaedia of Geography* (1834) had been published in Great Britain and the United States, a work that was to play a major role in China.

Murray took a stand in this controversy by referring to "the partition of Poland, justly regarded as one of the most iniquitous measures which have disgraced modern times," and continuing to treat Poland as a territorial nation although legally it had ceased to be in that league.²⁹ For him, "partition" already had moved from a neutral term to a breach of international law, which guaranteed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation-state. "The 'Partitions of Poland' (1772, 1793, 1795) that terminated in the removal of the ancient kingdom from the world's maps changed terminological history," writes Brendan O'Leary in one of the few historical surveys of the concept of partition.³⁰ Indeed, although this was not the only partition, its radicalism was such that the legal concept of "partition" became inextricably associated with the fate of Poland in the international discussion. As we shall see, this was even more so in China.

Much like Gützlaff, Murray did not see the primary cause of the partition of Poland in the greed and power of its neighbors, but in the internal conditions of the country, in "the incurable defects in the constitution of the [Polish] state."

The decline of Poland may be dated from the beginning of the last century, and may be ascribed partly to the improvement and augmented influence of Russia and Prussia, but in a far greater degree to the incurable defects in the constitution of the state. The nobles, about 500,000 in number, formed the nation; the rest of

29 Hugh Murray, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Geography: Comprising a Complete Description of the Earth, Exhibiting its Relation to the Heavenly Bodies, its Physical Structure, the Natural History of Each Country, and the Industry, Commerce, Political Institutions, and Civil and Social State of all Nations* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1837), vol. 2, 131. Lin Zexu had been shown this work by an American missionary, who had asked for another copy of this American edition to be given to Lin Zexu.

30 O'Leary, "Analysing partition," 888.

the inhabitants being slaves, incapable of acquiring any property in land, without any privileges, and sold, like cattle, with the estates to which they belonged.

These nobles were becoming ever more independent with their own armies and fortresses, and each one of them was able to bring the Diet to a standstill with a veto. "How much soever we may detest the means by which it [the partition] was effected, no one can regret the abolition of a system of government which combined all the mischiefs of anarchy without its stimulus to enterprise; which made every landlord a petty despot, and every cultivator a slave," Murray writes.³¹ The Vienna Congress confirmed the Polish partition against strong objections among some participants,³² but under the condition of Russia's introducing some liberal measures. After the 1830 uprising against Russia, however, Emperor Alexander removed these measures and incorporated the Russian section fully into his empire.

In 1839 Lin Zexu 林則徐 (1785–1850), the new Imperial Commissioner in Canton who was eager to expand his knowledge about the Westerners he had to deal with, had Leang A-teh, who had studied Murray (and English) with the missionary Elijah Bridgman, make a partial translation/summary of the 1837 American edition of Murray's work.³³

The Polish context was not lost in translation. Lin Zexu devotes an entire section to Poland in his *Records of the Four Continents* with Murray as his primary source. After Poland had gained in strength following the merger with Lithuania, he writes, the "nobility, several tens of thousands strong, ganged up together, grabbed independent power and did as they pleased with the king [. . .] who was unable to control the situation."³⁴ Russia, Austria and Prussia seemingly offered help, but ended

31 Murray, *Encyclopaedia of Geography*, II. 131.

32 Talleyrand was blunt in Vienna, arguing in December 1814 that the partition of Poland showed that "the nations of Europe are united to each other by no other moral ties than those which unite them to the islanders of the Pacific." Quoted in Henry Wheaton, *History of the Law of Nations in Europe and America; from the earliest times to the Treaty of Washington, 1842* (New York: Gould, Banks & Co., 1845), 429.

33 Suzanne W. Barnett, "Protestant Expansion and Chinese Views of the West," *Modern Asian Studies* 6.2 (1972): 141.

34 "國中土豪聚黨數十萬, 擅權自恣, 國王 [. . .] 不能制," entry Bolan 波蘭 in Lin Zexu 林則徐, *Sizhou zhi* 四洲志 [Records of the four continents] (1839/1840), in *Lin Zexu quanji* 林則徐全集 [Collected works by Lin Zexu] (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi, 2002), vol. 10, 82. The work survives in part in Wang Xiqi, *Xiaofanghuzhai yudi congchao zaibubian*, set 12. Many of the details are not to in

up each “grabbing” 奪去 a large slice of the country. While Lin Zexu strongly emphasized the internal causes for the partition, he does not include the Polish resistance of 1793 or 1830 into his narrative. The outright condemnation of the partition in Murray as well as Gützlaff is not reflected in Lin’s description. He rather—and somewhat surprisingly—agrees with Murray in stressing the positive aspects of the abolishment of the old system:

The laws (promulgated by the occupiers) initially had been severe and stern, but recently they have been relaxed with the people generally rejoicing in this so that the different parts of the country were more submissive than before.³⁵

法舊嚴峻，近改寬大，人咸欣悅，而各部落亦較前馴帖

Lin describes the partition, but still does not use a general concept.

Xu Jiyu’s 徐繼畲 1848 world geography, *Yinghuan zhilüe* 瀛寰志略 (Sketch of the globe), which is a truly authored study rather than an assembly of translations from Western sources like Lin Zexu’s and Wei Yuan’s geographical overviews,³⁶ became the most widely read world geography for the next decades in China as well as Japan.³⁷ It pioneered the use of *guafen* 瓜分 rather than just *fen* in its treatment of the Polish partition.³⁸ Xu treats Poland as a part of Russia in his world geography, but indicates the continuing existence of the Polish

Murray and might have been taken from the extensive entry “Poland” in Rees’ *Cyclopaedia* (1819), a work, which also had been introduced by a foreigner to Lin. For Lin Zexu’s reading of this work, see Milena Doleželová-Velingerová and Rudolf G. Wagner, “Introduction,” in *Chinese Encyclopaedias of New Global Knowledge (1870–1930): Changing Ways of Thought*, edited by Milena Doleželová-Velingerová and Rudolf G. Wagner (Heidelberg: Springer, 2014), 3.

35 Entry Bolan 波蘭 in Lin Zexu 林則徐, *Sizhou zhi* 四洲志, 82.

36 Wei Yuan 魏源, *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志 [Illustrated record of the countries by the oceans] (Yangzhou: Guweitang, 1844, expanded editions in 1847 and 1852). Wei only shortly refers to the Polish partition and does not take up Lin’s extensive treatment. The same is true for another important geographical work of the time, Majishi’s 瑪吉士 (Marques’) *Dili beikao* 地理備考 [Geographical reference] (1847), which refers to Poland’s glorious past in saving Vienna from the Ottoman Army and the later chaos which prompted Catherine to “swallow up,” *tun* 吞, a part of it. Majishi, *Xinshi dili beikao quanshu* 新釋地理備考全書 [Newly annotated complete geographical reference] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), *juan* 4, 325.

37 For background, see Chang Hsi-tung, “The Earliest Phase of the Introduction of Political Science into China,” *Yenching Journal of Social Studies* V.1 (1950), 22–29. Fred W. Drake, “A Mid-Nineteenth-Century Discovery of the Non-Chinese World,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 6.2 (1972): 205–224.

38 Wei Yuan also used *guafen* for the partition of Latin America among England, France and Holland. *Haiguo tuzhi*, *juan* 59.

nation by giving it a separate paragraph. He first stresses the internal conditions for the Polish demise: "Later Poland declined and sank into chaos [whereupon] Russia, Austria, and Prussia partitioned its state territory [among each other] with Russia getting two-thirds."³⁹ He follows Murray's narrative to the eventual abolishment of the Polish state:

In 1832, after officials from the former Polish kingdom had raised local troops to fight the Russian army but had been defeated and had fled, their land was eventually absorbed into Russia and connected with White Russia which [Russia] had obtained previously.⁴⁰

道光十二年波蘭遺臣據地起兵，與俄軍戰，潰敗而逃，其地卒歸於俄，合前所得百竅地

While all of the works discussed hitherto situate China in the world and mark their own relevancy with the importance of world geographical and historical knowledge by pointing to China's closer connection with the world through trade and military conflict, none of them indicate that Poland might become a matrix for the discussion of China's fate. The world geographies and world histories published in China before 1850, however, did introduce some new notions. They showed time and again that the history of a nation was not a stand-alone affair but was closely connected to its international relations. Once world geography and world history had become available in Chinese, the fates of other nations became a storehouse of political experience and potential points of reference for Chinese writers. In earlier Chinese historical works, other states had been treated as tribes at the border or tributaries, but little effort was made to describe their political institutions, history, or relations with states other than China. Another new argument was that the internal politics of a country, such as the calibre of its leader, the structure of its governance, and the attitude of elites as well as that of the people towards a common goal, would have a major impact on its standing among nations. Poland presented an extreme case where internal divisions, the egotism of the nobility, and their treatment of the Polish commoners like slaves or cattle led to the partition of the country and its disappearance from the political map.

39 "迨后波蘭衰亂，俄羅斯與奧地利亞、普魯士瓜分其國，俄得三分之二，" Xu Jiyu 徐繼畲, *Yinghuan zhilüe* 瀛寰志略 (private print, 1848) (N.p.: Shanyu lou, 1873), chap. 4, 16a.

40 Ibid.

***Guafen* as a legal concept in international law**

Concepts in whatever form are not stand-alone units. They are part of systemic universes in which their context and their counter-text or antonyms are located. The Chinese translation terms for “partition” inherited this context and counter-text.

Within the horizon of knowledge about world knowledge as appropriated and adapted by Chinese authors in the middle of the century, the fate of Poland became linked to and contrasted with that of other nations as much as the term “partition” had its synonyms and antonyms. While none of the early translations for “partition” such as to “swallow” (*tun* 吞), to “divide” (*fen* 分), or to “cut off” (*ge* 割), consolidated to become a concept or a legal category, the antonyms were already forming. Referring to an existing state territory, the terminology of international law contrasted “partition” as a transitive noun describing an action with “maintaining (or securing) territorial integrity,” a notion that often came paired with “independence.” This was rendered in Chinese as *baohuan* 保全. The antonym of partition as a historical process was “joining together,” which was rendered as *hecheng* 合成 in Chinese. While Poland was the concrete exemplar of being “partitioned,” the United States became the exemplar of its opposite, the different English, French, Spanish, and American Indian territories being “joined together” into the United States. The North American struggle and its heroes had been introduced in Chinese already in 1838 in Elijah Bridgman’s history of the United States, the main reference for the early Chinese world geographers and writers about the history of North America.⁴¹ The contrast with Poland was implicit but once perceived, it turned out to contain all the details: a strong leader committed to the public good, an engagement of the citizens for the cause of the (new) nation, and a willingness to take great risks for life and property to achieve independence from what then was the mightiest power in the world.⁴² We will see that this potential

41 Gao Liwen 高理文 (Elijah Bridgman), *Meilige heshengguo zhilüe* 美理哥合省國志略 [Outline of the history of the United States of America] (Singapore: Jianxia shuyuan, 1838). There are many later prints of this work with changed titles. An annotated version in abbreviated characters is in *Jindaishi ziliao* 92 (1997): 1–70. Gützlaff added to Bridgman’s image of the United States with various articles as well as the relevant chapter in his geographical-historical works. For details, see my forthcoming study “George Washington in China.”

42 Xu Jiyu’s paean on George Washington’s achievements had been noted by a missionary at the time. He had it carved in stone together with a translation and sent it to Washington D.C. where the Washington Monument was just being built. Together with many similar tributes, Xu’s is now part of the inside wall lining the staircase to the top of this monument. A second potential model of a leader for a late Qing Chinese future was Czar Peter of Russia. According

to treat the fate of the United States as the antonym and counter-text to Poland was explored by Chinese writers later in the century. Rebecca Karl has made a strong and well-documented argument about the importance of references to other countries as a warning or model for China had

for late Qing reformers after 1895.⁴³ Remaining bound to the master narrative of China's defeat in the war with Japan as the decisive break in the history of Chinese political thought, however, the previous decades of intense Chinese discussions of China in a world context remain outside her purview.

In terms of the study of a conceptual history that follows translingual and transcultural connections, we see that identifying a concept with a word is short-changing the range of possible conceptual articulation, which can include metaphor, simile, image, installation, institution, musical composition, action, and more. So far, we explored the process through which the revival of a rarely used local metaphor replaced narrative renderings to translate a foreign concept, the connection of this concept to a particular historical event and the debates it provoked, and the development of legal and historical context and antonyms in the form of different terms and historical developments. We have yet to map the systemic legal context that came with "partition." It was provided by the translation of works on international law into Chinese.

Murray's critical assessment of Poland's partition and of its toleration by foreign nations was widely shared by authors specializing in international law at the time such as Henry Wheaton (1785–1848), Robert Phillimore (1810–1885), and Johann Caspar Bluntschli (1808–1881), all of whose works were introduced to China through translations. Wheaton's *Elements of International Law* (Chinese translation 1864) focuses not on the internal Polish conditions for the partition,⁴⁴ but on the "anomalous" legal provisions

to the works hitherto presented, his main strength was in top-down modernization and bringing the centrifugal forces in the country to heel.

43 Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World. Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

44 Wheaton had done so extensively in the first section of the third part of his *History of the Law of Nations*, which first came out in French in 1841. There he details the three successive stages of Poland's partition, describing it as a flagrant breach of the principle of non-intervention into the internal affairs of other states that had been forming during the eighteenth century (269–281). While calling the partition "the most flagrant violation of natural justice and international law which has occurred since Europe first emerged from barbarism," he also took pains to show that the external interventions hinged on an internal weakness. They were "facilitated by the obstinate adherence of the Poles to the radical defects of their national constitution, by their blind intolerance and factious dissensions" (269). The three powers justified the partition with this internal anarchy, as this would

of the Congress of Vienna. It cemented, he argued, the partition, *guafen*, of Poland among the three powers while granting representation, a currency, and an army to the Poles. While Russia first abided by this provision, it eventually abolished all three elements after the Polish “revolution and the reconquest of Poland by Russia” (the November Uprising of 1830–1831, R.W.) and fully absorbed a large part of Poland into Russia in 1832 against the (ineffectual) protests of France and Great Britain.⁴⁵ Given the very official character of this Chinese translation, which had been done by the translation office of the newly established Translation Bureau, Tongwenguan, under the court’s new office in charge of international affairs, the Zongli Yamen, this translation of “partition” into *guafen* was instrumental in stabilizing *guafen* as the standard translation, which brought with it all the context of the original. Martin’s 1880 Chinese translation of Johann Kaspar Bluntschli’s 1878 work on international law also only refers to the external interventions as these are most relevant in international law. It again uses the *guafen* term. To exemplify the principle that “the expansion of the territory by one state does not justify that another state demands an expansion in its turn based on the principle of balance of power in international law,”⁴⁶ Bluntschli writes according to the Chinese version: “For the last century, states have time and again indulged in their craving for conquest in the name of maintaining the balance of power. Because Russia cut off a piece of Poland, Austria demanded some Turkish territory. The deliberations among Prussia, Austria and Russia to initiate the partition (*guafen* 瓜分) of Poland also used ‘balance of

end up making Poland the prey of one of its neighbors, which in turn would upset the necessary balance of powers among all of them. In the name of securing the balance of powers, the three neighboring powers all took a share, perverting in the process a legitimate goal of international law, namely avoiding the emergence of a single dominant power. Aware of the absence of an institution able to enforce adherence to international law, Wheaton deplored that the other states, especially England and France, stood by without using their powers to secure adherence to the norms. Henry Wheaton, *History of the Law of Nations in Europe and America from the Earliest Times to the Treaty of Washington*, 1842 (New York: Gould, Banks & Co., 1845). There is no early Chinese translation of this text into Chinese, and I have not seen any Chinese reference to this passage.

45 Henry Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, 6th edition arranged by William Beach Lawrence (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1855), 57–58. W.A.P. Martin’s Chinese translation was based on this edition. The relevant passage is (Huidun 惠頓 [Wheaton]), *Wanguo gongfa* 萬國公法 [International law], translated by Ding Weiliang 丁偉良 [W. A. P. Martin] (1862), reprint in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995–1999), vol. 1299, 478–479.

46 “遇此國加增土地，彼國不得托公法有均勢之義，遂求加增，” (Bulunshi 步倫氏 J. C. Bluntschli), *Gongfa huitong* 公法會通 [Handbook of international law], translated by Ding Weiliang 丁偉良 [W.A.P. Martin] (Shanghai: Tongwenguan, 1880), # 97, juan 1, 34a. This is a translation of Johann Caspar Bluntschli, *Das moderne Völkerrecht der civilisirten Staaten als Rechtsbuch dargestellt* (Nördlingen: Beck’sche Buchhandlung, 1868) that is based on the French translation of this work, *Le droit international codifié*, translated by Charles Lardy (Paris: Guillaumin, 1870).

power' to embellish the wrongdoing (involved) in this (act)."⁴⁷ Robert Phillimore's *Commentaries upon International Law* (translated 1894) follows the same usage.⁴⁸ "Partition" is not simply a historical activity carried out against a state, but it is part of a system of legal categories in international law. This system comes with its own hierarchies of norms, acceptable and unacceptable forms of action with cases to exemplify them, argumentation by legal specialists about the applicability of a given norm, sanctions, and discussions about the problem of enforcing the norms. This entire load was on the shoulders of *guafen* since the 1860s.

***Guafen* in universal histories**

By the time these commentaries on international law came out in Chinese translation, the first universal histories had taken up the topic, most importantly the text that served as the main reference in Japan as well as China, Okamoto Kansuke's 岡本監輔 (1839–1904) world history. A geographer, Okamoto had been active in introducing Western knowledge in Japan and in safeguarding Japanese claims to the Kurile Islands by organizing farmers to settle there. Written in Chinese with the use of the new conceptual vocabulary developed in Japan out of translations of Western terms, his world history was published nearly simultaneously in Japan in 1879 and by the Shenbaoguan in Shanghai in 1880.⁴⁹ Several

47 “百餘年來，各國每藉均勢之名，而肆其兼并之欲。俄國既割波蘭之地，奧國因求片土於土耳其。布奧俄尋創瓜分波蘭之議，即執均勢以飾其非，” *ibid.* The translation given here is based on the Chinese rather than the French version as this was in the hands of Chinese readers. In the third edition of his work in 1878, Bluntschli adds in #474 under the general heading of “Collapse of the internal order of the state. Intervention” a comment that the “demise of Poland is a shocking example of tearing up and killing a state.”

48 Phillimore closely follows Wheaton's argument (including the *guafen* term), see Robert Phillimore *Commentaries upon International Law*, third edition (London: Butterworths, 1879), #LXXIII, vol. 1, 94–97. Chinese translation *Geguo jiaoshe gongfa lun* 各國交涉公法論 [Treatise on international law of foreign relations], translated orally by Fulanya 傅蘭雅 [John Fryer], written form by Yu Shijue 俞世爵 (1894), in *Xixue fuqiang congshu* 西學富強叢書 [Collection of works of Western learning about making (a state) rich and powerful], compiled by Zhang Yinhan 張蔭桓 (Shanghai: Hongwen shuju, 1896), #LXXIII, 卷 2, 3b.

49 Huang Zunxian, who already had accumulated data for years to write a similar work, was as he said in “close contact” with Okamoto, who sent a draft asking for suggestions and criticisms to him and ambassador He Ruzhang. While both were excited to have such a work, Huang was critical of the lack of tables summarizing the basic information and He of the random selection from Western histories and the use of unreliable sources for China's history, while considering his treatment of Europe and the United States pioneering. See Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲, “Ping <wanguo shiji xu>,” 評《萬國史記序》 [Critical note on the preface of <History of all nations>], in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 黃遵憲全集 [Huang Zunxian collected works], edited by Chen Zheng 陳錚 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 1, 246–247.

reprints by different publishers before the end of the century signal its importance. It detailed Polish history in a separate section on seven pages with cross references in the section on Russia. Okamoto is a historian, and had more faith in popular resistance than international law. He does not tell the story of the internal conditions of Poland inviting foreign interference, is little interested in the plots of the foreign powers, and in discussions of international law. Instead, he offers a third narrative: that of a heroic Polish resistance against the dismemberment of the country. To provide some background, he highlights the great victory carried by the Poles in the battle against the Ottoman Turks outside of Vienna in 1683 and the great power and renown Poland had enjoyed in the aftermath. But later, the nobility rebelled against the king, chaos ensued, and the state was weakened—a possible reference to a constitution that allowed “every gentleman” to block any vote of the Sejm (parliament). Eventually, Russia interfered in the selection of a new Polish king and occupied parts of the country. Repeated rebellions “to secure Polish independence” (*bao qi duli* 保其獨立) in the 1760s and 1790s were crushed.⁵⁰ “Kościszko, a man of superior intelligence and courage who had gone to America and had gained merits for helping in the war of independence,”⁵¹ is held up for special praise for his role in the 1794 uprising, a judgment which prepared the way for his becoming one of Liang Qichao’s patriotic heroes some twenty years after Okamoto’s book had come out. However, the uprisings ended in the partitions of Poland. “Poland once a country priding itself of a population of twenty million people and 240 000 square miles had now come to its complete demise.”⁵² The “demise” in the end does not use any equivalent of the “partition” concept, but takes up Kościszko’s desperate “Poland is lost” (Bolan wang 波蘭亡) with the contrast built into Kościszko’s own experience of the United States gaining independence. Abiding by the Vienna Congress agreement of 1814, Emperor Alexander I established a Polish representation together with liberal reforms of the press. Making use of the leeway this provided, another uprising followed when Russia made efforts to prevent the 1830 French uprising from spreading to Poland. The ensuing battles ended with “the second demise” (*zai wang* 再亡) of Poland with thousands killed and many more deported to Siberia. The new Emperor Nikolaus abolished the reforms of his more liberal predecessor and made Poland an integral part of Russia. A slight

50 Okamoto Kansuke 岡本監輔, *Wanguo shiji* 萬國史記 [History of all nations] (1879) (Shanghai: Shenbaoguan, 1880), quoted from the later reprint (N.p.: Huaguo tang, 1900), juan 16, 20b.

51 “哥修士孤智勇過人，嘗赴美國，助其獨立有功，” *ibid.* 21a.

52 “波蘭嘗稱人口二千萬，廣袤二十四萬里，至此全亡，” *ibid.* 21b.

relaxation under his successor Alexander II ended in the 1863 uprising, which was crushed again with rigid censorship imposed and even “the use of the Polish language banned so as to dispel their patriotic feelings.”⁵³ Although “originally the different states had agreed during the debate at the Congress of Vienna to each make sure to guarantee the [Polish] constitution, at this moment (in 1835) their governments stood idly by and let the Russian Emperor do as he did and there was none who dared to point out that this was unacceptable.”⁵⁴

Okamoto ends his treatment of the different nations with a final evaluation. For Poland, this evaluation has all the ingredients to turn the fate of this country into a model case. He writes:

Assessment: Poland is a big state since the Middle Ages, the Sejm and the ruler united to time and again thwart the partition of the land by Russia, Prussia, and Austria. They [these three states] considered it to be theirs, but none of the different European nations—even those related to the Polish king by marriage—denounced this crime. But does the basic idea of international law not say that it is valid for the entire world? When the people of this country time and again raised the flag of righteous rebellion and when as they were already close to success they were suddenly close to defeat, the neighboring lords looked on with their hands in their sleeves and did not dare to rush to the [Poles'] aid—what else was this but fear of the Russians' strength and disdain for the Poles' weakness?! Alas! Being a Pole is something to be pitied. But once such [patriotic] feelings are there, the outcome is predictable. As long as the Russian court exerts violent repression and does not let them have their freedom, I am afraid the Russians' worry is not (the intervention of) Great Britain or France, but Poland.⁵⁵

53 “使波人不得用其本國語，以消其愛國心，” *ibid.*, 24a.

54 “初維也納大會，議時，各國相約，各保憲法，至是各國政府觀依俄帝所為，無敢論其非者也，” *ibid.*, 13a. This narrative was developed in much greater detail in Walter K. Kelly, *History of Russia from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, 2 vols. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855), translated as *Eshi ji yi* 俄史輯譯 [Records of Russian history translated] (preface 1886), translated by Xu Jingluo 徐景羅 (n. p.: Yizhi shuhui, 1888), reprinted in *Xixue fuqiang congshu*, sections 40–43, 47, and 67–68. It should be kept in mind that Peter the Great remained a model ruler for reformers such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei, again mostly based on Kelly. In the Chinese translation, however, his strong censure of Peter had been taken out or toned down, see Don Price, *Russia and the Roots of the Chinese Revolution, 1896–1911* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 35–36.

55 Okamoto, *Wanguo shiji*, juan 16, 24a–b.

論曰：波蘭為近古大國，會君統屢絕俄普奧三國，瓜分其地。以為己有，而歐洲諸國，連姻波王者，無問其罪。蓋公法大義未曰於天下也。其國人履舉義旗，垂成輒敗，鄰邦公伯，袖手旁觀，不敢赴較，豈非畏俄之強，而侮波之弱乎！嗚呼！為波民者亦可慙矣！然已有是心，則亦必有是事。若使俄庭強暴壓制，不肯許其自由，則吾恐俄人之患，不在英、法而在波蘭也。

The internal conditions of Poland mentioned by other authors as facilitating the partition, such as the dysfunctional Szymon, the treatment of the people by the nobility, the religious divide between Catholics and Protestants, and “more than half of the people wanting to become Russian citizens” go unmentioned, and the “chaos” (*luan* 亂) within Poland is attributed to foreign meddling. The hero of Okamoto’s story is the Polish people with its undaunted patriotism and struggle against the partition of the country and for regaining independence. The explicit reference to the weakness of international law and the ongoing trouble Russia would have with Polish resistance indirectly takes up Wheaton’s argument that in the end infractions do not pay off. At the same time, very much in tune with the “people’s rights” movement in Japan at the time, Okamoto added the people as stakeholders in upholding international law, a role traditionally only attributed to state governments.

The *guafen* threat becomes real: Russia’s eastern advance

Poland was the prime but not the only historical example for the discussion of partition.⁵⁶ By the late 1870s partition was again very much on the international agenda. The 1880 Berlin conference, in which the powers agreed on the partition of Africa (which was not seen as a continent with state borders and therefore was not treated as the partition of an existing state territory), is one example, but for China, the most important

56 By the 1880s, *guafen* was occasionally used in Chinese writing to refer to the split-up of Italy and or Turkey for all of which the foreign-language references had used “partition.” For the “partition of Italy into dozens of states” (意大利瓜分數十國), see Ma Jianzhong 馬建中, “Balifu youren shu” 巴黎復友人書 [Answer from Paris to a letter from a friend], in *Shikezhai jiyuan* 適可齋記言 [Notes from the Shike Studio], (1878) (Taipei: Wenhai, 1968), juan 2. The reference to the partition of the Ottoman Empire is in Young Allen’s translation of Malcolm MacColl’s *Three Years of the Eastern Question* (1878) as *Ouzhou dongfang jiaoshe ji* 歐洲東方交涉記 (Shanghai: Shanghai zhizaoju, 1880), juan 5. An article in the *Shenbao* in 1877 refers to rumors about the Russian-Ottoman War in an English-language Hong Kong paper concerning the split between the two Turkish aspirants to the throne and their plan to partition the country among them. “It recently occurred that the new and the old ruler of Turkey, one being greedy, and other dictatorial, made up their mind to partition their country among them” 今值土之新舊兩君一貪一暴，遂決志欲瓜分其國，“Shu benbao Tu E zhan hao hou” 書本報土俄戰耗後 [A follow-up note on our report about the disaster of a Russo-Turkish War], *Shenbao*, April 25, 1877, 1.

development was now in the present, namely the “Eastern Question” after the Crimean War. The information on this very contemporary development had become available in China already in 1880 through Young Allen’s translation of the Rev. Malcolm MacColl’s densely documented *Three Years of the Eastern Question* (1878), which operated with the legal *guafen* term and its *baoquan* (securing territorial integrity) opposite. Emperor Nicolaus I, who earlier had sealed the Polish partition, had defined the Ottoman Empire as the “sick man” of the Bosphorus in 1853. Russia, MacColl wrote, claimed it wished to protect the Christians living under Ottoman rule, but the British government under Disraeli doubted Russia’s motives. It assumed that Russia was out for territorial gain, consequently intervened in the Crimean War to prevent the partition of the Ottoman Empire and to secure its independence. Britain eventually signed a treaty providing such a guarantee. This policy came under attack by the late 1870s when reports about atrocities by Ottoman government troops in Bulgaria reached England and critics such as Gladstone were demanding a policy that would force the Ottoman ruler to abandon the policy of violent suppression and grant a degree of self-rule to the different peoples under his administration. The British government guarantee had been officially announced to the Sublime Porte in June 1876. It had reaffirmed the British commitment to the Paris treaty to secure the Ottoman Empire against foreign intervention, but declined intervention into internal affairs and was willing exert pressure on others not to intervene. Gladstone argued that Britain’s “previous commitment was to secure the Ottoman territory, but if the Ottoman Empire was like a sick man, Britain’s making sure it was not to be murdered by others did not mean it would secure it against suicide or sudden death.”⁵⁷ He added that British support against the Sublime Porte would be welcomed by Slavs of the Greek Christian faith, but still maintained: “It would be appropriate for England at this moment in time to be of one mind and to join forces with the Powers to preserve the territorial integrity of the Turkish state and to avert its partition (*guafen*) by the powers which would bring about great chaos.”⁵⁸ MacColl demanded to go further, namely to abolish British commitment to the territorial integrity and independence of Turkey and intervene with a strong hand against the Sublime Porte’s

57 “二十年以前本國任保土之責，以其若疾病者然保其不為人謀害，未保其自殉或身故也，” in Maigaoer 麥高爾 [Malcolm MacColl], *Ouzhou dongfang jiaoshe ji* 歐洲東方交涉記 [Record of Europe’s Far Eastern relations], translated by Lin Yuezhi 林樂知 [Young J. Allen] and Qu Anglai 瞿昂來 (Shanghai: Shanghai zhizaoju, 1880), juan 5, 2a下. The English version is Malcolm MacColl, *Three Years of the Eastern Question* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1878), 119.

58 “吾英宜及此時與各國同心協力，保全土國，毋使各國瓜分，致生大亂。” quoted from Maigaoer, *Ouzhou dongfang*, juan 5, 3a 下, MacColl, *Three Years*, 129.

abuse of its people. He also suggested that Russia's failure to secure a warm water port in the Mediterranean had prompted it to search for it in the Far East. The vast resources devoted to the development of the Transsiberian Railway were part of this strategy. This railway greatly enhanced Russian military mobility and threatened British India as well as the states of the Far East. This translation brought to China not just current information about an important political debate in Europe which could have major implications for China, about British policies towards a possible partition of the country, and about the controversies around this issue. It also documented how such matters could be controversially discussed in the West with the government, the opposition, the press, and individual authors all weighing in with public speeches, pamphlets, articles, and books.

To sum up, by the late 1880s, three narratives for the Polish partitions were available in China, focusing respectively on the internal fissures, the neighbors' greed, and the continued resistance. By 1890, the potential partition of China itself became a topic of discussion and concern in China and Chinese as well as foreign attitudes towards such a development were being explored. They all ended up being presented with the stabilized term *guafen* for "partition," dealt with the role of internal and external factors, and addressed the dialectics between norms of international law and popular attitudes. The MacColl translation came in the middle of a Chinese Russia scare and brought to China's doors what had been the fate of a distant nation.

The use of *guafen* to render "partition" transformed the term from a rarely and randomly used metaphorical expression for dividing up into a part of a system of concepts in international law. Within this system, *guafen* primarily interacts with the legal concepts of non-intervention, sovereignty, and balance of power on the one hand, and conquest, colony, protectorate, and popular resistance on the other. This system is the subject of an intense and continued public debate among two professional groups, namely, as indicated above, law specialists and historians. However, it gained its historical impact through its use by state governments to justify their actions and by a wider public to challenge such actions with the law specialists often joining in this public debate. As the system of international law gradually consolidated to become normative, it increasingly became generative of historical agency because all sides had recourse to it. The importance of the non-professional players such as state governments and peoples is due to the absence of an enforcing agency for international law. Its norms become effective through the willingness especially of state governments to enforce abeyance by others and through "peoples" in the

affected nation states clamoring for adherence to it. Bluntschli is very clear about this in his handbook on the “public law of civilized nations,” which combines the normative principles with a commentary about governments claiming to act in accordance with them, infractions, international reactions to such infractions, and the eventual outcome of such infractions.

It is useful to remember that parts of the population might view the partition of a state's territory as a legitimate goal to secure its existence, and as advantageous for economic development. The former aspect gained new legitimacy during the twentieth century when partition was supported, for example, by the Muslim League in India or the Bosnian Serbs as a way to secure what they saw as their dignified existence or their existence altogether. Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲, who had been part of the Chinese embassy in Japan, argued for the second aspect in his widely read *Chronicle of Japan*, which he wrote in 1887, but which was published only in 1895. Inserting commentaries as “Mr. Foreign Historian,” *waishi shi* 外史氏, he probed the possible advantages of a fragmented or partitioned China. Europe, he said, had greatly benefitted from the fragmentation of the Roman Empire into different states that were interacting, competing, and fighting with each other. He then continued with a bold claim that the same would be true for China.

I therefore think that as to being partitioned and split apart, with arms and turmoil everywhere, nothing compares to the “seven heroes” (states) of the Warring States period [in China], but this was the time of the greatest blossoming of ethics and model conduct [. . .], of [disquisitions] on penal laws and terms, [. . .] of [developing] vertical and horizontal alliances, [. . .] [theories about] *dao* and *de*, [. . .] heterodox teachings, [. . .] agricultural [techniques], [. . .] craftsmanship, [. . .] medicine, [. . .] commerce, [. . .] water management, [. . .] military science, [. . .] rhetoric, [. . .] and lyrics, [in short] human talent was at such a peak that the [men quoted as examples for each of these fields] became the founding fathers of all later professional specialties. Altogether making sure to maintain the achievements of the predecessors, the different states [during the Warring States period] made efforts to surge ahead, and as maintaining the achievements of the predecessors meant making sure to be protected, they made efforts to strengthen themselves—that is the cause for the prosperity of several of these states [existing side by side]!”⁵⁹

59 Huang Zunxian, *Riben guozhi* 日本國志 [Chronicle of Japan] (1895), in *Huang Zunxian quanji* 黃遵憲全集 [Huang Zunxian collected works], edited by Chen Zheng 陳錚 (Beijing: Zhonghua

外史氏曰：余聞之西人歐洲之興也，正以諸國鼎峙，各不相讓，藝術以相摩而善，武備以相競而強，物產以有無相通，得以盡地利而奪人巧。自法國十字軍起合縱連橫，鄰交日盛而國日強，比之羅馬一統時，其進步不可以道里計云其意。蓋謂交鄰之有大益也。余因思中國瓜分豆剖，干戈雲擾，莫甚於戰國七雄，而其時德行若孟荀，刑名若申韓，縱橫若蘇張，道德若莊列，異端若楊墨，農若李悝，工若公輸，醫若扁鵲，商若計研、范蠡，治水若鄭白、韓國，兵法若司馬、孫、吳，辯說若衍龍，文詞若屈宋，人材之盛，均為後來專家之祖。一統貴守成，列國務進取，守成貴自保，進取務自強，此列國之所由盛乎！

The period of the Warring States, highlighted in Chinese historiography as a period of deplorable disunity, was, Huang argues, the most creative and innovative period in Chinese history—and this in every respect ranging from philosophy to agriculture, from rhetoric to poetry and military strategy.

At about the same time when Huang's book came out, a surprising comment along the same lines was carried by the British press. It was attributed to the recently deceased Chinese ambassador in London, Zeng Jize 曾紀澤 (1839–1890) by Halliday Macartney, a Chinese official who as the son-in-law of the dominant Chinese politician Li Hongzhang and Secretary to the Chinese Legation in London commands some credibility. Macartney was quoted as claiming that Ambassador Zeng had said that China would eventually “be split into three countries, each more strong in arms and commerce than the [entire] country at present.”⁶⁰ Three years prior, Zeng had argued in a widely circulated and controversially discussed English-language article that China's military modernization efforts had been a success, and that it now would even reclaim its prerogatives in its former tributaries Korea and Burma.⁶¹ His sojourn in Europe might have convinced Zeng that smaller, more manageable countries operating in a competitive environment would each be more powerful than the larger entity of which they had been a part. Neither Huang Zunxian's musings nor Ambassador Zeng's prediction, however, ever became a mainstream line of argument in China.

While the danger of a partition of China was as yet rarely mentioned in Chinese writings, and if so, then out of public view, it had been thematized

shuju, 2005), vol. 2, juan 4, 931–32. For sinologists, I have retained in the Chinese text the examples quoted for each of these achievements.

60 Quoted in the rubric POLITICS AND SOCIETY, *The Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), May 1, 1890; Issue 16245.

61 Tseng (=Zeng Jize), “China: The Sleep, and the Awakening,” *Asiatic Quarterly Review* 3.1 (1887): 1–12. For background, see Rudolf G. Wagner, “China ‘Asleep’ and ‘Awakening’”, 58–70.

already for many years in Western-language newspapers as well as in pamphlets published in the West and/or China. In October 1855, a J. D. Hutchinson had given a lecture in Shanghai on the occasion of the outbreak of the Crimean War. It focused on Russia expanding its territory through annexation and partition. Russia preceded its expansion by sowing internal dissent with Poland being the prime example. Hutchinson even claimed that the Taiping rebellion in China had been instigated by Russia for the same purpose.⁶² The speaker was highly critical of Britain's reluctance to intervene and prevent a Russian partition of China. In 1860, in the wake of the Second Opium or Arrow War, the *North China Herald* (Shanghai) reprinted an article from the *Saturday Review* in London, which addressed the victor's quandary faced by the British after winning a war with a Chinese government already weakened by a costly civil war with the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. The article nicely challenges the simplistic assumption that in an asymmetry of power, such as that prevailing between China and Great Britain at the time, the dominant side can do as it pleases.

In this complicated quarrel there is the singular peculiarity that a decisive victory would be almost as mischievous as a sound defeat. The highly artificial organization of the Chinese government might perhaps be hopelessly deranged by a violent shock offered to its power and credit. It is impossible to manage that great and singular portion of the human race except by the machinery which they have provided for themselves. A conquest or treaty which involved the fall of the Imperial Government would perhaps leave no authority standing with which it would be possible to deal. It is provoking that the bees so obstinately refuse access to their honey; but the state of affairs will not be improved by upsetting their hive.

Some useful suggestion will be found in a little pamphlet attributed to an officer and diplomatist who has had peculiar opportunities of understanding the Chinese question. And there will be little difference of opinion as to the importance of his reference to the probable object of the French expedition. "The Partition of China," says the writer, "can conduce to no good interests of Great Britain; and it is to be regretted that circumstances should have made us the masters of the ceremonies to victors [such as the French, R.W.] prone to conceive and agree upon grandiose ideas for the treatment of sick princes and disturbed people."⁶³

62 J. D. Hutchinson, "Lecture on the War," *North China Herald*, October 13, 1855, 1.

63 "Lord Elgin and Sir Michael Seymour," *Saturday Review* February 25, 1860, reprinted in *North*

The argument presented in this anonymous pamphlet is so close to one repeated by Garnet Wolseley (1833–1913) in later writings⁶⁴—after he had become Chief of Staff of the British Army—that it is safe to assume the “officer and diplomatist who has had peculiar opportunities of understanding the Chinese question” refers to him. Wolseley had been an officer in the Arrow War and played a role in the treaty negotiations. Britain, he argued, was forced to sustain the Chinese government which it had just defeated to prevent this huge country from descending into chaos and the competing Powers upsetting the precarious balance among them by grabbing parts. A basic constellation emerges in Wolseley’s article in which Russia and France are charged with being interested in territorial acquisitions regardless of the fate of the Qing government, and Great Britain opting to sustain the Qing government and China’s territorial integrity. In an 1865 review of events, the *North China Herald* claimed that the country was under a double foreign threat. According to the “inevitability of a Law of nature that where two civilizations are placed side by side on the same soil, the higher grade must prevail to the extinction of the lower,” and there might be a chance that the Chinese “educated and thinking classes” will be roused to action under the foreign influence. “A flame may some day burst forth where it is least expected, from embers first kindled by foreigners.” The second threat lay in foreign relations. “China, like the sick man of Turkey, is too rich to be allowed to perish intestate. If indeed the Empire is now in its last convulsive throbs [. . .] there are at least four states who not only are willing but who also in such an emergency be compelled to share the effects of the deceased.” To prevent this dismemberment, the Chinese government had better “keep on good terms with the European powers.” There is little indication, however, of such efforts and “if the Chinese government not only alienates friendly foreign powers, but converts them into enemies, the work of partition will soon commence, and Russia, France, England and America [will] swoop around the carcass of the defunct empire.”⁶⁵ A December 1866 editorial in the *North China Herald* ended its description of the “gradual degeneration” of Manchu rule in China as follows: “At present, probably, its [China’s, R.W.] greatest safety lies in the fact that neither of the four nations most interested in its trade would allow the others to gain an advantage it did not share; and, to avoid

China Herald, May 5, 1860, 3.

64 See the text referenced in footnote 134.

65 “Retrospect of events which occurred in the north of China during 1865,” *North China Herald*, January 6, 1866, 3.

a general partition, all will refrain from encroaching."⁶⁶ A few weeks later and in view of Russian encroachments on Chinese territory in the north, the paper came back with an explicit recommendation: "Until therefore we agree in the partition of China which has been predicted as inevitable—Russia taking the north, England the middle, and France the south—, it is the interest of the two latter powers to combine in supporting the Chinese against the aggressive policy of the former."⁶⁷

By this time, the Zongli Yamen had been established as China's foreign office in Peking. A translation office had been established in connection with it, and its duties were, apart from educating translators, to provide renderings of relevant works such as Wheaton's *International Law* and of relevant newspaper articles. There was thus a channel for such articles to reach the upper levels of the Chinese bureaucracy. Although no record is known that indexes the newspaper translations made at the time by the translation office, the Chinese discussion of the later years suggests familiarity with the lines of argument developed here.

Once there were actual prospects of a partition of China, the Chinese discussion unanimously decried it as a national tragedy. Technically speaking, "partition" is a neutral term. Huang Zunxian's use of the term to describe the innovations flourishing during the Warring States period shows that the same was (and remains to this day) true for the Chinese translation. Once such terms, however, become attached to a particular application and environment, this neutrality disappears. In the present case the use of the term "partition" to express Poland's fate in the language of international law and world history already predetermined a negative valuation. In an age of rising nationalisms, focused on principles such as sovereignty and territorial integrity, "partition" implies going against the foundations of international law.⁶⁸ Conceptual history has to take into account whether a seemingly neutral concept has become tied to a specific historical development, which in turn determines its validation and legitimizes actions based on this fixed validation.

66 "Retrospect of events in China during 1866," *North China Herald*, December 19, 1866, 206.

67 Editorial, *North China Herald*, January 12, 1867, 6.

68 It will be noted that under different circumstances, such as at the end of WWII, in multinational bodies such as the WHO or European Union, but also in the handling of states that are perceived as failed states, or in cases of blatant human rights violations, there is growing consensus that these two elements are not sacrosanct.

In 1876, the *North China Herald* translated an extensive plan laid out by a Wang Ping to recover the region of Ili in China's northwest that had been occupied by Russian troops in 1871 when they quelled a Muslim rebellion there. This plan already contained the rhetorical features that were to dominate later Chinese discussions. It seems to have survived only in this translation.

Some people [. . .] go so far as to advocate the partition of the territory [with Russia taking one part]; but such suggestions must be characterized as those of mere temporizers, who seek peace of fear of the difficulty before them. Such language evidently emanates from those unmindful of the labour, toil, and anxiety it cost our sacred ancestors, their Majesties, to bequeath this territory to us. Instead of talking of relinquishing or giving up our inheritance, were it but one inch in area instead of being as large as China proper, it [the Ili region, R.W.] should be purged of every rebel [a reference to the Muslim rebels, R.W.].⁶⁹

Wang goes on to consider the Chinese territory as a single body where a disease that afflicts one part will end up affecting even the head, namely the court in Peking. Two years later, in 1878, China's ambassador to Japan, He Ruzhang 何如璋 (1838–1891), noted in a memorial to Li Hongzhang that the loss of the Ryukyu Islands to Japan would only precipitate the loss of the next tributary state, Korea, and position Japan in a situation to then go for Taiwan, in short “struggling for it today might entail a calamity that was still tolerable, but abandoning it would entail an even graver calamity.”⁷⁰

He Ruzhang had taken Huang Zunxian along to Japan as an advisor. In 1880, in the middle of a crisis that was pitting two factions against each other in Korea, China supported the conservative wing and Japan the reform faction, while Russia was edging to intervene. Using written Chinese characters as their medium of communication, He and Huang engaged in a discussion about Korea's fate with the Korean envoy to

69 Wang Ping, “Proposed Programme of Campaign Against Turkestan,” *North China Herald*, March 30, 1876, 298.

70 “今日爭之患猶紓，今日棄之患更深也。” This secret memorial, dated ninth of the fifth month, Guangxu 4 (1878), is included in the correspondence of Li Hongzhang, who rejected the proposal to resist Japan's ambitions with military means because his main concern was with the Russian pressure from the north and he wanted to avoid conflicts on two fronts. “He Zie lai han” 何子焜來函 [Letter from He Zie (=He Ruzhang)], in *Li Hongzhang quanji* 李鴻章全集 [Collected works by Li Hongzhang], vol. 31, 307–308 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007).

Japan, Kim Goeng-jip 金宏集 (1842–1896).⁷¹ Afraid that much of their far-reaching proposals concerning issues—about which their Korean counterpart professed perfect ignorance—would otherwise remain barely understood, Huang summarized the Chinese ambassador's suggestions to their Korean counterpart in a strategic memorial boldly entitled "A Strategy for Korea."

This stunning memorial became the first Chinese strategic assessment of world politics to enter the East Asian public and multilingual discussion. Integrating arguments about Korea's economy, foreign trade, geographical position, and foreign relations with historical observations about the strategy of other countries in a similar situation, it offered a knowledgeable sketch of Russia's Far Eastern ambitions together with sophisticated proposals about political ways to counter them. It came with much current information that was articulated in the new vocabulary of international relations now available in Chinese and Japanese through translations of treatises on international law and extensive outlines of world history, and it had direct implications for China. First published in the Chinese original in a Japanese-language newspaper in Tokyo, it was later translated into English in the *Japan Weekly Mail* in the Yokohama International Settlement, a translation that was eventually reprinted in the *North China Herald* in Shanghai.⁷² Submitted by Kim to the throne in Korea, it was accepted but not without a long string of massive protests over the coming years from Korean scholars who were demanding that their country should keep to isolationism and the state doctrine of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism instead of opening up, engaging with others, and modernizing. The protesters went so far as to demand the decapitation of Kim, but Kim had his way and many of them were forced into exile.⁷³ Warding off the Russian advance in East Asia was

71 Better known under the name of Kim Hong-jip 金弘集 which he used when he was Prime Minister pushing the Gabo Reforms in 1895–96. In 1880, he confessed to still being largely uninformed about the world.

72 Huang Zunxian, "Chaoxian celüe" 朝鮮策略, *Tōkyō Nichinichi Shimbun*, April 6, 7, 8, 1881. Translation as Kwo-in Ken, "A Chinese Statesman on Corea," *Japan Weekly Mail*, vol. 5 (1881), reprinted in *North China Herald*, May 6, 1881, 444–445 and May 27, 1881, 513–514. The English translation greatly abbreviates the Korean objections brought forth by Kim. Amazingly, the Chinese text was not reprinted by either the Chinese-language Hong Kong papers or the *Shenbao* in Shanghai. To facilitate access, the quotations refer to the Chinese edition in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, vol. 1, 251–258.

73 For the background of the writing of the "Strategy for Korea" and the Korean reception, see Yang Tianshi 楊天石, "Huang Zunxian de <Chaoxian celüe> jiqi fengbo," 黃遵憲的《朝鮮策略》及其風波 [Huang Zunxian's *Strategy of Korea* and the controversies surrounding it], *Jindaishi yanjiu* 3 (1994): 177–192.

at the center of these discussions. Russia's push east after the frustration of its southern forays towards Turkey had become a standard narrative at the time. Huang saw the main difference between Russian ambitions and those of other powers in Russia's appropriating territory while the other powers, especially the US and Great Britain, were mostly interested in trade access, at least in East Asia.⁷⁴ The concerns about Russia's ambitions that were shared by China and Japan prompted the formation of the "Raise Asia Association" (*Xingya hui* 興亞會), in Tōkyō in 1880 that was to build closer connections between Japan, China, and Korea.

As Huang's text foreshadows many of the later discussions about China, it deserves close attention. He predicted that the Korean refusal to open its ports for trade and its court for international relations would lead to the country's altogether being "swallowed up" by Russia⁷⁵ in the same way that Burma or India had been by England, the Philippines by Spain, and Indonesia by Holland. Should the other powers not tolerate such a disturbance of the "balance of powers," (*junshi* 均勢) (254), Korea would be partitioned among them—Huang uses *gefen* 劃分, "split up and divide" instead of *guafen* here—, and share the fate that Poland had suffered and Turkey had just barely avoided (255). "Nothing could be worse than to idly look on as the Russian army pushes forward and to idly listen as others go about partitioning and dissolving [states]" (257).⁷⁶ True, he wrote,

the international law of the West does not condone cutting off or annihilating the states of others, but if there is a state without treaties, it has no one to communicate with if something happens. This is the reason why the Western states want to have treaty relations with Korea [because] by protecting Korea [against Russia] they are protecting themselves. (254)

泰西公法無得剪滅人國，然苟非條約之國，有事不得與聞，此泰西諸國所以欲與朝鮮結盟也保朝鮮，及所以自保

74 The section on nineteenth century Russia in Okamoto's *World History* with its wide circulation and frequent reprints in China and Japan since 1879 is entirely devoted to describing these steps to expand Russia-controlled land towards the East. Okamoto, *Wanguo shiji*, juan 16, 6b. It should be kept in mind that, according to Malcolm MacColl's *Three Years of the Eastern Question* (1878), "it is the settled belief of a large segment of Englishmen that Russia is pursuing her conquests in Central Asia for the purpose of pushing her frontier to some convenient point from which she may be able to invade India," 237–238, a conflict referred to at the time as the "Great Game." Huang, in contrast, sees the main thrust of the Russian advance in the Far East with Korea as the weak link. The concern with Russia's eastward push must also have prompted the 1888 translation of Kelly's 1855, *History of Russia*.

75 Huang refers to the Russian Czar having "the ambition to swallow up everything in the eight directions," 吞八荒之心. "Chaoxian celüe," 251.

76 "坐視俄師之長驅，坐聽他人之瓜分瓦解，而害可勝言哉。"

Once it controlled all of Asia, Russia, the argument went, would again turn its attentions to Europe (254). In this extremely critical situation, Korea had to make up its mind and pursue a policy that would not only secure its survival but also foster its prosperity. It should uphold its long-standing status as a dependency of China, yet modernize itself; forget the irritations and form an alliance with Japan; and, most importantly, develop close relations with the United States. The latter was the one mighty power “not interested in territorial acquisition” (*bu tan ren tudi* 不貪人土地), and, because it had gained freedom and independence from European repression, it was “friendly towards Asia and kept its distance from Europe.”⁷⁷ Korea should conclude a trade agreement with the United States, which could then serve as a template for agreements with other nations; it should send students to China, Japan, and the West; it should modernize, and it should form alliances that would secure its existence. According to the deft translation of the *Japan Weekly Mail*,

the [Korean, R.W.] King should decide once for all, and entrust the arrangement of details to his ministers. No discussion of the main question should be permitted. Government officials must divest themselves of ancient prejudices and open their eyes to what is going on in the world, while the people at large should rouse themselves on behalf of their country. Corea's integrity or dismemberment now depends upon the course of her government. The fate of Asia is in the balance. (258)

決計在國主，輔謀在樞府，講求時務，無立異同在廷臣，力破積習，開導淺識，在士大夫，多發興起，同心合力在國民，得其道則強，失其道則亡，一轉移間，而朝鮮宗社繫焉，亞細亞之大局繫焉。

In this impressive document, we see Huang Zunxian—barely over thirty at the time and not speaking or reading a foreign language—thoroughly familiar with the conceptual apparatus and the factual information needed to develop a strategy for a state within the international context of the day. To give an example, he randomly referred to Belgium's foreign relations to show how a small state can survive even when surrounded by big powers. If one replaces “Korea” in his text with “China,” it becomes evident how pertinent the analysis and strategy was for Huang's own country, and indeed, the text constantly and critically refers to the experiences of China in negotiating treaties with foreign powers and to the differences in dealing with Catholic and Protestant missionaries.

77 “常親於亞細亞，常疏於歐羅巴，” “Chaoxian celüe,” 252.

A commentary added by Huang Zunxian himself to a poem he wrote in 1899 signals that, at least orally, China's critical juncture was already being discussed around 1880 in the terms used for Korea in "A Strategy for Korea."

When I was in Japan [between 1877 and 1880, R. W.], I said to Ambassador Zi'e [He Ruzhang]: "China will inevitably change and follow the Western methods. I do not know whether this change will be like Japan's self-strengthening, like Egypt's being subjected, like India's coming under [foreign] administration, or like Poland being partitioned, but the essential thing is that change will inevitably come."⁷⁸

在日本時與子峨星使言：中國必變，從西法。其變法也，或如日本之自強，或如埃及之被逼，或如印度之受轄，或如波蘭之瓜分，則吾不敢知。要之必變。

Huang added that this assessment from the late 1870s was like the "letter (hidden) in a well" that accurately predicted a future development, a reference to a Song-dynasty text that had just been found.

In the Ili proposal referred to above, a narrative emerges that, rather than focusing on the foreigners'—in this case Russia's—territorial ambitions, adopted a strongly nationalist tone by accusing certain Chinese officials of selling out instead of safeguarding "every inch" of the country. Ambassador He Ruzhang's letter to Li Hongzhang about the threatening loss of the Ryukyu Islands to Japan and its consequences does not name Chinese officials willing to cede the islands to Japan. Eventually, the islands were indeed ceded. Given Li Hongzhang's dominant position at the Peking court (and his primary concern about Russia at this time),⁷⁹ the letter might indirectly point at Li Hongzhang himself, who many years later would be blamed by reformers to have shown exactly such an attitude in the negotiations of the Treaty of Shimonoseki after China's defeat in the war with Japan. Read as a coded text written with the encouragement of Ambassador He Ruzhang about needed reforms in China, Huang Zunxian's lucid proposals for Korea can be summarized as follows: To avoid becoming a colony or being partitioned and secure its territorial integrity and path to prosperity, China should clamp down on conservative isolationists and open up for trade and diplomatic exchange. Such a reform should be set in motion top-down by an enlightened ruler of the type Japan had in the Meiji Emperor.

78 Huang Zunxian, *Renjinglu shicao, Yigai zashi* 入境廬詩草，己亥雜詩 [Draft poems from the Mirror of Humanity Hut, mixed poems from 1899] no. 47, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, vol. 1, 158.

79 See Li Hongzhang's 1880 letter to He Ruzhang quoted in Yang Tianshi, "Huang Zunxian," 181.

Huang's proposals go much further than anything proposed at the time by the Yangwu (Western Learning) advocates at the top of the Chinese bureaucracy and bluntly put the blame for the dangerous weakness of Korea/China at the feet of officials stuck in the "engrained habits" (*ji xi* 積習) of Neo-Confucianism and at the lack of "innovative energy" (*xingqi* 興起) among the gentry.⁸⁰ It does not even offer the soothing explanation that these modern reforms would only realize the shared ideal of good governance inherited from the Three Dynasties when sages had ruled the realm. At this time, however, people like Huang Zunxian or Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–1897), a newspaper editor and writer with whom he was in correspondence, did not yet see the Chinese polity in as critical a state as that of Korea. It seemed that Westernization was bound to come, but whether this would be a boon or a bane for the Chinese state was yet to be seen.

There had been discussions since the 1860s among some Chinese writers about the need for reforms along Western lines, if one does not read Xu Jiyu's enthusiastic treatment of the United States in his 1848 world geography as an indirect commentary on what was needed for China. The first explicit arguments in this direction were made in the 1860s, but remained unpublished (Wang Tao) or only circulated in manuscript (Feng Guifen 馮桂芬, 1809–1874), because the leaders of the "Western Learning" current blocked their publication. The *Shenbao* newspaper from Shanghai, which was under British management and not under the control of the Chinese court or high officials, ventilated this option since 1872 in a carefully crafted line of argument. It stressed the compatibility of the Western as well as the Meiji reforms with the ideals of governance inherited from Chinese antiquity. By the 1880s, this line of argument had become widely shared among the early reformers.⁸¹ These essays and newspaper editorials were critical of the current state of affairs and noted China's failure to respond to a major shift in the political environment. They foresaw utopian prospects should China follow these foreign (and past) models, but still refrained from publicly warning of the dangers for China inherent in its present path that could lead to a fate similar to that of Poland.

80 Seen against this background, it is not surprising that publication of Huang's *magnum opus* on the Meiji reforms, which spelled out the needed reforms in greater detail in 1887, was blocked by Li Hongzhang until China's defeat in the war with Japan in 1895. See Douglas Reynolds with Carol T. Reynolds, *East Meets East. Chinese Discover the Modern World in Japan, 1854–1898* (Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 2014), 128.

81 For this entire background, see Rudolf G. Wagner, "The Free Flow of Communication between High and Low: The *Shenbao* as Platform for Yangwu Discussions on Political Reform 1872–1895," *T'oung Pao*, in press.

The partition of China in the Western press

Chinese authors began to intensely discuss the partition as a distinct threat to China in 1895 after the conditions of the Shimonoseki Treaty had become known and the prospect of a partition of the country started to be widely discussed in the Western press.⁸² While the Sino-Japanese War was still going on in July 1894, Sir Thomas Wade, widely respected for his China expertise as former British Ambassador to China, weighed in. China, he said, already “lost Tonquin, Cochin China and Annam to France, Burmah to us, half of Kuldja to Russia, and in 1877–78 it allowed Japan to alienate the islands of Liu-chu [Ryukyu] without an effort beyond remonstrance.”⁸³ He anticipated that a Japanese victory in the war with China would be quickly followed by “the intervention of Russia on the north [. . .] and of France on the south.” These two, “if left to themselves [. . .] might be minded to partition China,” but other nations such as Germany and even the United States would not idly stand by, interested as they were in maintaining the balance of power.⁸⁴ The constellation from 1860 is still intact: Russia and France are both charged with aiming at territorial acquisitions, England opposes a partition and is interested in trade, but in the end, Wade saw all other powers forced to intervene to maintain balance. Specific proposals for a partition were forthcoming from Russia. A widely distributed September 24, 1894, Reuter dispatch from St. Petersburg quoted the Russian Novosti news agency as suggesting that “European intervention should not be restricted to re-establishing the status quo [. . .]. Russia, Great Britain and France [should] come to an understanding with a view to a partition of China by a joint occupation. Such an occupation would be comparable to the conquest of America or the division of Africa, and would prove of immense service to the cause of civilization, in which China—always a useless nation—has never done any good.”⁸⁵

82 A reference in 1892 to Japan’s annexing the Ryukyu Islands did not signal awareness of a wider threat. Xiang Zaoxin 項藻馨, “De Ao Yi hezong E Fa lianheng lun” 德奧意合縱俄法連橫論 [On the vertical alliance between Germany, Austria, and Italy and the horizontal alliance between Russia and France], *Gezhi shuyuan keyi* 格致書院課藝 (Shanghai: Gezhi shuyuan, 1892).

83 “The Chino-Japanese Conflict and After. A Conversation with Sir Thomas Wade,” *The Contemporary Review*, July 1, 1894, 616.

84 “The Chino-Japanese Conflict,” 621–22. This conversation was widely quoted in the British press especially as Wade repeated the core arguments in a talk in November. See, for example, “The Future of China,” *The Graphic*, November 17, 1894, 562, and “Sir Thomas Wade On China And Japan,” *The Times*, November 5, 1894, 11.

85 Reuter telegram from September 27, 1894, quoted from *Birmingham Daily Post*, September 28, 1894.

The international press also took note that between 1894 and 1898 the influential German journalist Eugen Wolf wrote articles for the *Berliner Tageblatt* that were strongly pushing for a German share in the spoils of China. Wolf suggested that the Russian sphere should be extending to the Yellow River, the German from the Yellow River to the Yangtse River, the English indefinitely south of the Yangtse, and the French northward from Yunnan up to the borders of the English sphere. "The partition was suggested as a commercial rather than a political division."⁸⁶

Partition was a constant international topic during the 1880s and 1890. The 1884/5 Berlin conference on the partition of Africa was just a beginning, the partition of Turkey was the next hot topic, only to be replaced by the partition of China, and even this was accompanied by discussions about the partitions of Bengal, Siam, Samoa, and Indochina. The framing of the policies that were actually pursued varied widely, ranging from partition resulting from the disintegration of a dysfunctional state (Turkey) to the partition of a continent with few state-like structures (Africa). The very controversial discussion about a partition of China took on a dramatic urgency after China's defeat in the war with Japan and the accompanying riots against foreigners. A September 1895 editorial in the *North China Herald* showed both the international perception of China at the time and the quandary of finding a solution. It agreed that

what the deeply offended nations [. . .] demand is guarantees and good government, and guarantees and good government are just what China has not, and does not know how to get. There are many intelligent persons deeply interested in the coming settlement who [. . .] perceiving that desperate diseases demand desperate remedies, are ready with a final measure of a heroic type. China must be divided.

After considering, however, the cost administering and policing vast swaths of China, the inevitable frictions between the powers involved in the partition, and the question whether the Chinese, "who have less patriotism than could be desired, but have never been subjected to the test of national extinction," "will put up with it," the editorial ended with a resounding "word of advice to Powers about to partition China: Don't."⁸⁷ The editorial saw the origins of this discussion not in the greed of the Powers for power and profit but in the failure of

86 Summarized in "For the Partition of China," *New York Tribune*, January 11, 1897.

87 "The Coming Partition of China," *North China Herald*, September 13, 1895.

Chinese governance and the constant irritation this was causing in her relations with foreign powers.

The climate changed when word got out of a secret treaty concluded between China and Russia that gave Russia vast and exclusive rights in China's Northeast against a credit to pay the reparations demanded by Japan—the Li Hongzhang/Lobanov Treaty of June 1896—and when in 1898 China granted a lease to Germany for the part of the Shandong Peninsula that Germany had occupied in 1897. Even countries such as Great Britain, who had strongly favoured maintaining the territorial integrity and enabling the Chinese government to manage its governance of China, began to doubt whether they had any counterparts in the Chinese government sharing this commitment, and whether they should not rather grab a share before it was too late. In the heated international climate of nationalist aspirations that came with substantial local mass appeal, the discussion about the future of China regularly filled newspaper columns even in local papers such as the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* in Great Britain or the *Butte Miner Weekly* in Montana in the United States.⁸⁸ A look at such local papers in Great Britain and the United States shows how the timeline during which they carried a regular column entitled “Partition of China” or a similar formula (figure 2).⁸⁹

The frontlines of this international discussion were clear: There was strong and explicit support for partition among journalists and official circles in Russia, Germany, and France. However, it never became government policy, and the Powers were warily watching each other's steps. When, in 1903, Russia started setting up tax collecting offices in the part of Manchuria along the new railway which it controlled, this made headlines in the foreign as well as the young Chinese reform press. In Britain, government opinion started off relatively united against partition and in favour of preserving the territorial integrity of China. However, once it seemed that the Chinese government was making deals with Russia and then Germany, the British government considered making its own bid for territory. This was widely and publicly opposed by the British press and by the British community in the Chinese Treaty Ports.

88 Papers such as the *Times* in London with their own correspondents in China would keep to more general columns such as “The Powers and China,” “China and Japan,” or “The Far East.” The graph was constructed by using two databases, *America's Historical Newspapers* (Chester: Readex, 2004), and *British Library Newspapers I–IV* in *Newsvault* (United States: Cengage Learning, n.d.).

89 As the trove of German-language newspapers from the period that has been digitized lacks a full-text search option, and the number of French and Russian papers of the time that are accessible in digitized format is even smaller, I have not included their coverage in this table.

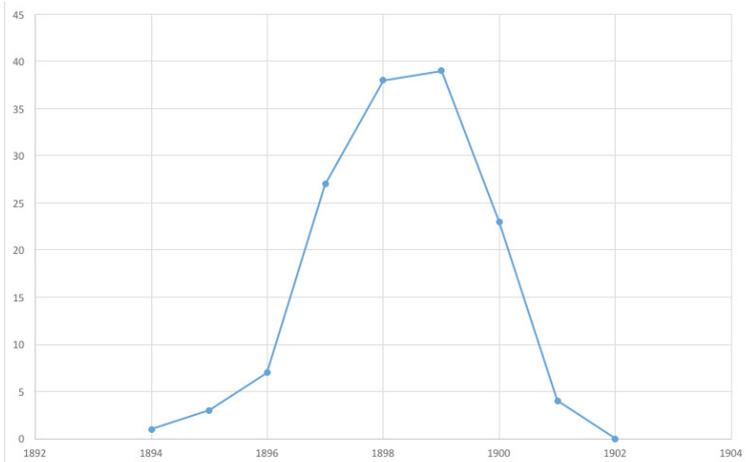


Fig. 2: "Partition" and "China" in titles of articles in the local US and British press exclusive of the London Times, the New York Times, and similar papers, but including the San Francisco Chronicle. 1892–1905.

In the United States, the government and the press as well as the American community in the Treaty Ports remained steadfastly opposed to partition, and the government, as we shall see, intervened very publicly to forestall any such plan in 1899 and again in 1900.

China joins the *guafen* discussion: Struggling for discursive hegemony

The process of introducing this international discussion to monolingual readers of Chinese was started by Westerners publishing Chinese-language papers committed to the betterment of China. Introducing this topic into the public Chinese discussion implied a challenge to the government on two fronts: In terms of content, it disagreed with the court's assessment of the situation and questioned the court's capability to handle such a crisis with its dated policies. In terms of form, it asserted the public's right to join in the debate about the nation's fate rather than seeing it as the exclusive privilege of the court and officialdom. In other words, pushing the partition threat into the public debate involved starting a struggle for discursive hegemony with the court.

In January 1895, the *Wanguo gongbao* 萬國公報 (English title: *A Review of the Times*), a newspaper managed by Young Allen from the American Southern Methodist Episcopal Mission and close to people who gained prominence within the

reform drive such as Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), published a translation of Wade’s 1894 “conversation.”⁹⁰ The Chinese writers taking up the issue of a looming partition of China were very consciously joining an international discussion that had gone on already “for decades” (Liang Qichao),⁹¹ was “time again written about in Western papers and discussed by Westerners” (Wang Kangnian 汪康年 1860–1911),⁹² and might even have been started by Otto von Bismarck before he left office in 1890 (*Shenbao*).⁹³ They perceived a dangerous asymmetry not just in terms of information about the state of the country and the attitude of the Powers, but also an asymmetry between China and the West of informed argument about foreign attitudes and possible strategies for China to avoid a partition as well as of patriotic commitment to their respective nations. In 1896, Wang Kangnian, who had just founded the reform paper *Shiwu bao* 時務報 (Current affairs), put it bluntly in an article about a self-strengthening strategy for China:

Now as to the partition of China, the Western papers time and again write about it, and the Westerners constantly talk about it. Even the dumbest of men will recognize how dangerous this is, but still the court has no policy, neither at court nor in the provinces are there firm proposals, none of the old flaws have been discarded, no reform schemes have been promulgated, in short, if [officials] are not content with doing nothing, they act without a policy.⁹⁴

90 Wei Toma 威妥瑪 (Thomas Wade) “Ying qian shi Hua Wei Tuoma dachen Da dongfang shiju wen” 英前使華威妥瑪大臣會東方時局問 [Interview with Thomas Wade, formerly British Ambassador to China, on the situation in the Far East], translated by Lin Yuezhi 林樂知 (Young Allen), *Wanguo gongbao* 73 (1895): 4b–11a. This translation was included among the standard references in the 1897 edition of policy essays that included a long section of Yangwu (Foreign Learning) essays. See Wei Toma 威妥瑪 [Thomas Wade], “Da dongfang shiju wen” 會東方時局問 [Interview about the situation in the Far East], *Huangchao jingshiwen sanbian* 皇朝經世文三編 [Comprehensive collection of statecraft essays from our august dynasty, third set], compiled by Chen Zhongyi 陳忠倚, 80 juan (Shanghai: Baowen shuju, 1898), juan 5, Xueshu 學術 5, Guanglun 廣論, 27a–30a.

91 Liang Qichao, “Guafen weiyen” 瓜分危言 [Warnings about partition], *Qingyi bao*, May 15, 1899.

92 Wang Kangnian 汪康年, “Zhongguo ziqiang ce, shang” 中國自強策, 上 [Policies for China’s self-strengthening], pt. 1, *Shiwubao* 4 (1896): 203.

93 “It is said that the former German chancellor Bismarck [who left office in 1890] was the first to suggest the partition of China” 瓜分中國之說, 相傳創自德故相俾思麥克, “Lun guafen Zhongguo fei Taixi geguo zhi benxin” 論瓜分中國非泰西各國之本心 [Partitioning China is not the ultimate aim of the different Western states], *Shenbao*, September 16, 1898. No historical record of Bismarck’s suggestion is known, and it might refer to Bismarck’s role in the 1884/5 Berlin conference on partitioning Africa.

94 Zhang Kangnian, “Zhongguo ziqiang ce, shang,” 203.

瓜分中國之說，西報履載之、西人履言之。雖至愚之人，亦知其殆，然而朝廷無定策，中外無定議，舊弊未一除，新猷未一布，則非安於不為，即以爲無策也

To start remedy this situation and transform a translated concept from international law describing the threat to the country (i.e. the danger of being partitioned) into a powerful political tool that would force the court out of its perceived inertia, the critics of the court's policies made efforts to mobilize the young and presumably more open-minded generation of the educated elite. The first letter to the emperor drafted by Kang Youwei after the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki had become known and signed by ten thousand examination candidates assembled in the capital was a first effort at translating words describing the situation of the country into powerful public pressure for action. Kang and his students and associates such as Liang Qichao seem to have developed a good understanding of the power public opinion had in Japan and the West. They proceeded to build an institutional infrastructure in Shanghai and thus beyond the court's control that would allow them to challenge the discursive hegemony of the court. The role of the institutional frame, such as the control of media, educational institutions, or levers of government, in securing a concept's standing is a little-studied issue in conceptual history.

Because no national civil organizations existed in China as of yet, Kang Youwei relied on the networking inadvertently done by the imperial examination system to connect with possible signatories of his letters to the Emperor. The next step, however, was to start newspapers and periodicals to inform and educate this target group of young educated men. The third step was to set up new "study societies." These were modelled on the *Association for the Promotion of Study*, (*Qiangxue hui* 強學會), which Kang had set up in 1895. Some of these new societies were opening regional branches such as the Association to Protect the Nation, (*Baoguo hui* 保國會), while others were bundling the energies of people from the same province who happened to reside in Peking such as the Association to Protect Sichuan Province (*Baochuan hui* 保川會). The total number of such new associations/pressure groups was computed by some as being as high as seventy-eight.⁹⁵ Their purpose was to consolidate the regional and national networks; assure that the pressure they exerted became sustainable and focused; establish reform facts on the ground, and increase the channels through which this pressure could be exerted, especially by the

95 Li Wenhai 李文海, "Wuxu weixin yundong shiqi de xuehui zuzhi" 戊戌維新運動的學會組織 [Study associations organized during the period of the Wuxu (1898) reform movement], *Wuxu weixin yundong lunwenji* 戊戌維新運動論文集 [Collection of essays on the Wuxu reform movement], edited by Hu Shengwu 胡繩武 (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1983), 48–78.

publication of newspapers. As will be discussed below, they were building on an already developed “elite activism.”

These newspapers and their editors are all well known. A selective list of their titles and editors will show the range of these regional and national efforts.⁹⁶

Wanguo gongbao 萬國公報 (English title: Review of the Times), founded 1895.8, editor: Kang Youwei 康有為.

Qiangxue bao 強學報 (Encouragement to study), 1896, editor: Kang Youwei.

Shiwu bao 時務報 (English title: The Chinese Progress), 1896, editor Wang Kangnian.

Subao 蘇報 (Suzhou journal), founded 1896, editor Hu Zhang 胡璋.

Qingyi bao 清議報 (English title: The China Discussion), founded 1898, editor Liang Qichao.

Zhixin bao 知新報 (English title: The Reformer of China), founded 1897.2, editor Liang Qichao.

Xiangxue xinbao 湘學新報 (Hunan learning news), founded 1897.4, editor Tang Caichang.

Lingxue bao 嶺學報 (Southern learning news), founded 1898, manager Li Guolian 黎國廉, editor Zhu Qi 朱淇.

Guowen bao 國聞報 (National news), founded 1897.10, editor Yan Fu.

Shixue bao 實學報 (Applied learning), founded 1897.10, editor Zhang Binglin.

Jicheng bao 集成報 (Reader’s digest), founded 1897 (consists of reprints from other papers).

The editors of these papers spent much of their energy on locating, translating, and publishing foreign reports. This expanded the practice of

96 Historical records and lists drawn up by modern scholars of these “study societies” as well as the papers started by reformers between 1896 and 1898 will be found in Tang Zhijun 湯志鈞, *Wuxu shiqi de xuehui he baokan* 戊戌時期的學會和報刊 [Study societies and newspapers of the Wuxu period] (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1993), 285–308. Because not more than the name remains of many of these societies and because no copies of some of the papers have survived, no hard numbers can be established.

papers such as the *Shenbao*, which for decades had been publishing international news of relevance for China. For this, the *Shenbao* had been drawing on Reuters as well as foreign-language papers and journals, but had only rarely published full translations of policy essays. The new papers could not afford news agency subscriptions and published full translations from foreign papers and journals. They were coping with an information asymmetry between China and the West that did not simply relate to knowledge about the world, but about China itself, including its history, geography, geology, language, and demography.⁹⁷ In the reading of the reformers as well as foreign observers, this was no accident, but the result of a refusal by the educated elite to realize the importance of new knowledge and make efforts to acquire it. The international discussion about China's partition was first introduced in detail in these reform journals. To give an example, twenty-nine of the thirty-five references in the *Shiwu bao* of 1896 where *guafen* referred to China, occurred in translations from Western papers. Nevertheless, to turn *guafen* into a powerful and even dominant narrative that would be shared beyond the fairly narrow circle of young educated people, who were reading these new and often short-lived reform papers and magazines, would be a long and tortuous process.

A look at the raw data will illustrate this. The database compiled by Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng includes the reform papers, the large collections of policy essays, and books dealing with contemporary Chinese policy questions, but does not include commercial papers such as the *Shenbao*. A search for the period from January 1895 to the end of December 1899 yields over one thousand passages where *guafen* refers to China.⁹⁸ All but forty-five of them stem from the reform newspapers and periodicals. The rest were in books advocating reform and only a very small number occurred in memorials by officials. If we look at the same period in the *Shenbao*, we find a continuous and often neutral use of *guafen* for dividing money and fifty-five occurrences of *guafen* to describe the political fate

97 This asymmetry of information was often seen as shocking and shameful. Such impressions were articulated in the prefaces to works such as Luo Zhenyu's 羅振宇 preface to Naka Michiyo's *History of China* (1896) or Chen Shoupeng's 陳壽彭 preface to his translation of the British Admiralty's *China Sea Directory* in 1900. For the former, see Rudolf G. Wagner, "Importing a 'New History' for the New Nation: China 1899," in *Historization—Historisierung*, edited by Glen Most, Aporemata, Kritische Studien zur Philologiegeschichte, vol. 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 275–292, for the latter Chen Shoupeng, "Zixu" 自序 [Preface], *Xinyi Zhongguo jianghai jianyao tuzhi* 新譯中國江海險要圖誌 [Illustrated record of danger points in China's rivers and coastline], translated by Chen Shoupeng (Shanghai: Jingshiwen she, 1900).

98 *Zhongguo jindai sixiang yu wenxue shi 1820–1930 zhuanke shujuku* 1820–1930, 中國近代思想與文學史1820–1930 專業數據庫 [Specialized database on modern Chinese history of thought and literature], http://dsmctl.nccu.edu.tw/d_host_e.html.

of China. There is no occurrence in 1895, one in 1896, fifteen in 1897, twenty-eight in 1898, and six in 1899. These numbers are actually deceptive, because first, the *Shenbao* is a daily while most of the reform papers came out as weeklies or every two days, and second, because the *Shenbao* used the *guafen* term in news items that were based on foreign sources while practically all of the reform papers had the form of original or translated editorial articles. Of the fifteen items in the *Shenbao* in 1897, six occurred in editorial articles. Of the twenty-eight in 1898—after the German occupation of Shandong—twenty-five appeared in editorial articles, but only two of the six occurrences in 1899 were in editorial articles, and these referred to foreigners discussing it and to Liang Qichao daring to hold the Empress Dowager Cixi responsible should partition occur.

In short, the reform papers were not able to establish a discursive hegemony about the threat of China's partition in official communications and newspapers beyond the few months between late 1897 and early 1898 when the focus of attention was on the German occupation of parts of Shandong province. This is no accident as there was no agreement that indeed the partition of China was a real threat. *Guafen* with its trimmed sense as the illegitimate partition of something that is entitled to stay together and the policy agenda it supported remained a polemical narrative associated with the reform papers at least until 1900.

How then did the reform papers frame the *guafen* discourse? It is one thing to establish a term in the public discourse, but it is another to establish it with a tight narrative that calls for action, justifies it and gives it power by having it widely accepted while delegitimizing all those who fail to see the point and refuse to take action. As we have seen, there were three narratives for the partition of Poland. These were known in China, and they provided the templates for discussing the potential partition of China.

Kang Youwei 康有為 was a subscriber of the foreign-managed *Wanguo gongbao* who did not read any foreign language but had become a leading spokesman for young elite members who felt humiliated by China's loss to Japan and frustrated with what they saw as the helpless response of the court. At the beginning of his third letter to the Emperor, which he wrote in May 1895, he took up the foreign discussion about the threat of a partition, *guafen*, of China as outlined by Wade. Not willing to depend solely on the court's response, he set up his own *Wanguo gongbao* 萬國公報 in August of the same year. This newspaper had the main purpose of translating up-to-date Reuters releases and articles from Western papers

about international politics into Chinese. It also gave him a public platform to articulate his views on the matter.

His letter to the Emperor dated May 30, 1895, started out like this:

I humbly [observe] that recently the dispute in Korea with the Japanese invaders led to a cessation of territory [Taiwan and the Liaodong peninsula, the latter returned to China later in this year following pressure from the Western powers, R. W.] and to paying reparations. Nothing comparable has occurred in the over two hundred years of the Sacred Qing Dynasty and it has angered and pained officials and the people in the country. True, shame for the state might be a minor affair, but if the foreigners' greed is spurred on by it, a partition [of the country by them] would be a major disaster. Cutting off a piece of territory might be a minor affair, but if the frontier inhabitants have no security, the dissolution [of the entire country] would be a major disaster.⁹⁹

竊近者朝鮮之變日人內犯致割地賠餉，此聖清二百餘年未有之大辱，天下臣民所發憤、痛心者也。然辱國之事小，外國皆啓覬覦，則瓜分之患大。割地之事小，邊民皆不自保，則瓦解之患大。

Kang Youwei indicates that a perceived internal weakness of the Chinese state, which became painfully visible when it signed off on a deal that would not only put an end to the tributary relationship with Korea, but also mean ceding a major piece of Chinese territory and paying reparations, will surely stir the Powers' appetite for a partition of the country.

Tang Caichang 唐才常 (1867–1900), a man with a traditional education who had been turned into a political activist by China's loss in the war with Japan, was possibly inspired by Kang's letter to the Emperor when in early June 1895 he wrote in a private letter to his father about the Qing ceding control over Taiwan to Japan: "I am afraid that the harbingers of a partition of the empire altogether are already foreshadowed by Taiwan" (竊恐天下瓜分之兆，已先見於臺灣矣).¹⁰⁰ As far as can be documented, Cai's statement about Taiwan was still an outlier in the Chinese language

99 Kang Youwei, "Jin shang huangdi disan shu" 今上皇帝第三書 [Third letter to the present Emperor], May 30, 1895, in *Nanhai xiansheng si shangshu ji* 南海先生四上書記 [Collection of the four letters by Kang Youwei to the court], in *Xizheng congshu* 西政叢書 [Collection of works on Western policies] (Shanghai: Shenji shuzhuang, 1897), juan 3, 1.

100 "竊恐天下瓜分之兆，已先見於臺灣矣," Tang Caichang 唐才常, "Shang fu shu," 上父書 [Letter to my father] #16, in *Tang Caichang ji* 唐才常集 [Collected works by Tang Caichang] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 223.

discussion, quite apart from being contained within a private letter that was made public only in 1980. However, there were other signs of the *guafen* narrative strengthening: In the same year, 1895, officials who thought moderate reforms were necessary such as Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909) occasionally took up the issue including the *guafen* vocabulary in internal memoranda. Neither Kang, nor Tang, nor these officials, however, elaborated on the causes or recommended a course of action. While these timid steps were taken, a diverse group formed in the far south which followed a more radical assessment of the Qing court's ineptitude and the system on which it was based. It consisted of Hong Kong residents with full or partial Chinese parentage such as Tse Tsan Tai, the author of the 1899 poster "The Situation in the Far East" that is discussed below (Figure 18). Most of them were English native speakers but had no or very limited Chinese literacy, others were Overseas Chinese and Cantonese with overseas experience. The group tried to instigate, also in 1895, an upheaval that was to make Guangdong province independent of China. The idea was that once Guangdong gained independence, the province would pioneer the needed reforms for the country as a whole, a step that would also secure support from the Powers and prevent the partition of the country as a whole. The group never considered its efforts to split off Guangdong from the Qing as falling under the heading of *guafen*.

Once the new reform journals were set up, the reformers moved from memorials to the Emperor to published articles intending to develop the *guafen* narrative into a specific agenda for action. A January 1876 article in Kang Youwei's paper *Qiangxue bao* is a good early example. True, it said, there are states with limited territories, small populations or meager resources that have gone under, but none of these criteria fit China. However, there is India, Africa, and Turkey, each of them with vast territories, rich resources, and large populations, but they either became a colony (India), were partitioned (Africa), or lost wars (Turkey), while little Denmark survived by managing its trade well and mobilizing its talents. As long as China did not manage its basic problem—namely, its dysfunctional examination system that critics claimed was stultifying students with irrelevant rote learning and left them incapable of dealing with real-world problems—so as to fully develop its rich talent pool, all reforms were doomed.¹⁰¹ The fate of the state, it argued, did not depend on the attitude of foreign powers but on the quality of internal governance.

101 "Bianfa dang zhi benyuan shuo" 變法當知本原說 [Reforms need to understand the ultimate cause (of the crisis)], *Qiangxue bao*, January 2, 1896.

A few months later, Liang Qichao developed this line of argument further in "Narrative of Poland's Demise."¹⁰² He ended this article with his own assessment, where he blasted the Russian "whale" for using strategies ranging from military conquest to religious alliances and marriage to gobble up states for its own territorial expansion; he also decried well-intentioned scholars as the ultimate dumbbells for hoping to counter brute force with international law, and blamed the Powers for looking on as Poland was partitioned. He concluded that it was suicidal to rely on international law and the intervention of others without, above all, going for self-strengthening:

In short, neither in territory nor in population Russia's neighbors such as Sweden and Denmark were superior to Poland, but both of them maintained their independence to this day. That means that the Poles brought about their own demise, it was not brought about by Russia.

今夫麟俄之國若瑞典若丹麥，其地其民未有以逾於波蘭，而至今巋然尚存。然波蘭者其亦自亡，非俄之亡之也。

This conclusion rebuts the beginning of the article, which had summarized the common opinion that Russia was the cause of Poland's demise. While the article itself is just a summary of the history of Poland as offered by the translations mentioned above, without adding new information, it is relevant for Liang's view about who was to blame.

True, he argued, Russian repression had been brutal, but the "internal politics" of Poland, once a "heroic country that had secured Europe" (*gu Ouzhou zhi xiongguo* 固歐洲之雄國),

were not taken care of, ruler and people had become used to laziness, the officials were greedy and lazy in their duties, popular disturbances rose all over, which they could not handle themselves, and the public as well as the private sectors became more indigent by the day.

君民上下習於疲軟，在官諸臣貪惰夫職，民亂毛起，不能自救，公私困窮日甚一日。

That is when Russia intervened, stationing a powerful ambassador in Warsaw who liberally handed out money with the result that both the nobility and the people became enamored with the Russians "to the point that more than

102 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, "Bolan miewang ji," 波蘭滅亡記 [A narrative of Poland's demise], *Shiwu bao*, August 3, 1896, 2b-4a.

half of the population wanted to become Russian citizens.”¹⁰³ Eventually, there were many upheavals by the people against Russia, but all were crushed. In the end, Poland disappeared from the map. Liang sees a chain of events that began with the neglect of the internal governance of the state, negligence and laziness shared by ruler and people, official corruption, all of which ended in revolts and impoverishment that could not be overcome with local means. All of this alluded to China’s internal situation at the time. The external situation also had its parallels. Russia had used Poland’s internal weakness to intervene as a force of order and prosperity only to eventually appropriate large parts, while at present, Russia was the threatening foreign power and was currently engaged in secret negotiations with the Peking court. The court, the elite, and the people of Poland were all to blame for the partition of their country, and the same would be true for China now. Liang’s assessment of the state of China agreed with that of the Powers as well as most Western papers. The partition of China had become a topic of discussion at all because of its abysmal state of governance that threatened the fragile international balance of power. Poland was to remain a regular reference for China during the coming years.¹⁰⁴ The agenda coming with the *guafen* narrative, however, was one of urgent reform, not passive acceptance of the inevitable. Accordingly, it came with a polemic against those in the government who did nothing to avert this danger and against the foreign governments and foreign media who were accused of preparing public opinion in their countries for an eventual partition of China. They did so by describing China’s governance as incompetent and its people as hopelessly primitive. Fundamentally, however, Liang claimed, the yellow and the white race were equal in quality. If only the talents of the Chinese were released and mobilized, they would very quickly be on top of the world. A triple agenda thus informs the *guafen* narrative: a critique of the weak Chinese court, a critique of foreign propaganda that was preparing for a partition of China, and mobilization of members of the elite for reform. A good example combining all three is Liang Qichao’s programmatic 1897 article “On China’s Future Strength.”

The article starts with a polemic against the techniques presumably used by Westerners to prepare public opinion for their goal of subduing other peoples and their states.

103 “甚至百姓欲為俄民者過半,” *ibid.*, 3a.

104 For a first sketch of the treatment of Poland in late Qing Chinese writings, see Irene Eber, “Poland and Polish Authors in Modern Chinese Literature and Translation,” *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. 31 (1974–1975): 407–445.

The Westerners' ridiculing of China is really going too far. When they want to wipe out a state belonging to others, they inevitably bring this up in their parliament and publicize it in the newspapers, talking every day about the abysmal quality of its governance, the chaos in its social order, and the officials' wanton abuse of power.¹⁰⁵

西人侮我甚矣。西人之將滅人國也，則必上之於議院，下之於報章，日日言其國政之敗壞、綱紀之紊亂、官吏之苛驕。

When “going for the annihilation of a race” (*qi jiang mie renzhong ye* 其將滅人種也) the Westerners denounce its “ferociousness” (*guanghan* 獷悍), the “abomination of its culture” (*jiaohua zhi feizhui* 教化之廢墜), and the “absurd restrictions of its customs” (*fengsu zhi milan* 風俗之糜爛)

so that the gentry and people in their own as well as their neighbouring countries hear about this. Then the kind ones among them [a probable reference to missionaries such as Timothy Richard, Westerns in Chinese employ such as the Inspector General of the Chinese Maritime Customs, Robert Hart, and publishers such as the manager of the *Shenbao*, Ernest Major, R.W.] are concerned and think of ways of reforming the polity in order to deliver it from these flaws, while the vicious ones come up with tricks, thinking of benefitting from these flaws for their own purposes. Consequently and because the masses [in these Western states R.W.] demand it time and again, they tear down this state and enslave its race while self-confidently looking on as if they had been guided by humaneness and justice.¹⁰⁶

使其本國之民士，若鄰國之民士，聞其言也。仁者愀然，思革其政以拯其難，鷙者狡焉，思乘其敝以逞其志。夫然後一衆人之所欲，一舉再舉而墟其國、奴其種而嫻然猶以仁義之師自居。

This happened to India, just happened to Turkey, and was now happening to China. Because the Western international law was only valid among civilized states, this Western narrative denies that states such as Turkey and China qualified for its protection. Because they were not different from wild tribes, any action against them was justified. Descriptions of Taiwanese in Japanese papers are an example and the fact that Europeans were assigning envoys to China who had previously served in Africa showed the same

105 Liang Qichao, “Lun Zhongguo zhi jiang qiang” 論中國之將強, *Shiwu bao* 31 (1897): 413.

106 Ibid.

attitude.¹⁰⁷ In short, “the recklessness with which we are marginalized, humbled, treated as savages, slaves, or animals, and are considered lazy has reached an extreme” (414) (*qing wo, jian wo, yeman wo, nuli wo, lishou wo, shiju wo, qi canku zhiyu ruci qi ji ye* 輕我、賤我、野蠻我、奴隸我、禽獸我、尸居我, 其慘酷至於如此其極也).

However, so Liang, the Westerners are wrong, and Liang repeats the same racial prejudice towards others that he accused Westerners of in their denigration of his countrymen: the Chinese, Liang claims, have a much greater potential than the Indians. After all, even over hundred years after the British had set up schools for them “only the most accomplished talents are a match for the people coming from England,”¹⁰⁸ while the Turkish Muslims are altogether “cruel and barbarous, saying one will be reborn in heaven for killing others.” “Only between the yellow and the white races is the difference [with regard to the brain] not great, whatever the white man can do, the yellow man can do as well.”¹⁰⁹ Although it is true that China’s internal governance is abysmal,

the schools and academies stubbornly keep to their dry wells, there is empty babble and formality while old habits have not been reformed, there are up-and coming talents who have yet to enter adulthood with their exceptional qualities, great ambition, and heroic plans. Aya! If one says that heaven will not let China go under, then [the fact is that] the prospect of a partitioning of China is just five years away and the situation of internal strife is desperate. Even if we avoid saying the country will go under, can we say things are good? But if one says that heaven will let China go under, why then did it give her so many talents, only to have them treated like slaves and cattle?¹¹⁰

雖鄉曲學研，枯守智井，侈言尊攘，舊習未改，而後起之秀，年在肉冠一下者，類多資稟絕特，志氣宏遠，才略沈雄。嗟乎。謂天不亡中國也，則瓜分之約，期以五年，內訌之形，必不可終日，雖諱言亡，寧有幸也。謂天之亡中國也，則何必生此無數人才？

107 Others would elaborate after 1900 that this foreign propaganda also included appropriating the histories of other peoples so as to deprive them of their pride and justify their subjugation. Tang Xiaobing’s commentary on his translation of a history of the Philippine revolution is one such example, see Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World*, 105–109.

108 “其人才成就，能與旅印之英人齊驅，” Liang Qichao, “Lun Zhongguo zhi jiang qiang,” 414.

109 “惟黃之與白，殆不甚遠，故白人所能為之事，黃人無不能者，” *ibid.*, 415.

110 *Ibid.*, 414.

Liang then moves on to the third element, mobilizing those who might be open for the message of reform. "I appeal to the heroes concerned with China to loudly call out to the world: There is no reason for China to go under, no, it is sure to find a way to strength."¹¹¹

By 1897 the hopes of Liang, Kang, and their associates were pinned on the Guangxu Emperor's willingness to support reform but Liang was already beginning to target different set of addressees. They are not members of the court and the bureaucratic elite willing to support reforms. The natural candidates to be the "heroes" of the new age are the "up-and-coming talents who have yet to enter adulthood with their exceptional qualities, great ambition, and heroic plans." These young men have not yet been stultified by the examination system and are malleable for the new message. In the next turn in the debate when the efforts to convince the court had failed, these youngsters of "Young China" will join Young England, Jungdeutschland, Giovine Italia, Młoda Polska, and others in breaking with old traditions and bring about reform, hopefully led in China by the man who will then call himself "Youth of young China" (*Shaonian Zhongguo zhi zhaonian* 少年中國之少年)—Liang Qichao himself. Liang lists three reasons why China eventually will be strong: first, like the Japanese who he says belong to the same race as the Chinese, show, there is no lack in talent; second, a new law of history is on China's side. While "currently, on an overall average, in the West, the gentlemen are the majority and the savages the minority, while in China the gentlemen are the minority and the savages the majority,"¹¹² the West is heading for an economic collapse following rising wages and prices. China, on the other hand, can rely on long work hours and low wages to increase its power to the point that no one can bully her. Third, it is true that the Europeans have taken over much of the world, but their population is too small and, as their many gentlemen are used to supervise but not to engage in hard work, they have to turn to the East for labor forces. Once the exploitation has run its course, the Yellow Race "will rise and revive" (*nai qi er su zhi* 乃起而蘇之也) (419).

For a young man of four and twenty, these certainly were big claims and they were all pitched on a presumed law of history that "distress has reached the extreme, times will change" and move in the opposite direction (*qiong ji ze bian* 窮極則變), a law first articulated in the *Book of Changes* that was

111 "吾請與國之豪傑，大聲呼於天下曰：中國無可亡之理，而有必強之道，" *ibid.*, 415.

112 "今天下大較，西國則君子多而野人少，中國則君子少而野人多，" *ibid.*, 416.

often invoked at the time when reforms were proposed.¹¹³ This law justified the cost of radical change with the promise of future bliss.

Liang was aware that his grandiloquent claims were far from generally accepted and at the end of the article, he inserted a critique of his argument to refute it before it has even been made.

Someone questioned this: This [claim that] ‘the prospect of a partitioning of China is just five years away, and the situation of internal strife is desperate’ is nothing but self-aggrandizing bragging. The sun goes down over the Yanzi mountain, there is not a day without death [meaning that things are getting worse and worse], and you little guy are well aware that these idle words about strength and prosperity are of no avail. Really, you are just too dumb and out of your senses if you are not intentionally making up these big words to have fun and fool everyone else.¹¹⁴

汲汲顧影日薄崦嵫死喪無日皇(=違)言盛強,五尺之童知其無救,甚矣吾子至愚而病狂也不則故為大言以自憊以欺天下。

Liang answers “[according to the *Book of Changes*], without getting to the extreme of *bo* 剝 (stripping away) there is no quick *fu* 復 (recovery).”¹¹⁵ George Washington’s bloody eight-year war “was bad for many years [...] for both South and North, but in the end did it hurt America’s strength?”¹¹⁶ In the same manner, China’s eventual strengthening would demand many sacrifices. As Liang’s hope at this time was to also move the emperor and high officials to support reforms, there is no explicit polemic here against the court, although by this time he was aware of the role China’s secret treaty with Russia had played, because this had been covered in detail in the foreign language press.

Also in 1897, Tang Caichang published an article that included a full retranslation into Chinese of the Sino-Russian Treaty from a Western source. He quoted Liang’s opinion that the Russian credit was not based on any Russian love for China, and also offered a knowledgeable,

113 It was even quoted in the edict opening the “reform of governance” period in early 1901. “Chi neiwai chengong tiaochen bianfa” 飭內外臣工條陳變法 [Ordering officials from the court and the provinces to submit reform proposals], in *Guangxu zhengyao* 光緒政要 [Precis of Guangxu period policies], edited by Shen Tongsheng 沈桐生 (Shanghai: Chongyi tang, 1909), juan 26, 28a.

114 Liang Qichao, “Lun Zhongguo zhi jiang qiang,” 420.

115 “不極剝者不速復,” *ibid.*

116 “華盛頓八歲血戰, 南北美頻年交惡, 於美之強, 寧有害焉,” *ibid.*

if one-sided summary of the “[Western] discussion about the partition, *guafen*, [of China].”¹¹⁷ The efforts following the Westphalian Treaty to achieve a modicum of international order, Tang wrote, had yielded good results until the early nineteenth century, but now, suspicion and backdoor dealings had become the norm among the powers. The earliest example for this had been the partition of Poland, and currently continued with the partition of Africa. Without attacking the court directly, Tang also argued that China had brought this fate upon herself with the Sino-Russian Treaty.

When things are rotten, worms appear, empty holes attract wind, good and bad luck are unpredictable, it is what people bring about themselves. If indeed this [Sino-Russian Treaty] is a fact [which the Russians kept denying, R.W.], China does not qualify as a state and the people living there are just dumbbells.¹¹⁸

物腐生蠹 穴空來風，禍福無門，惟人自召。斯約如確，中國不國，生靈索然。

Tang takes up Liang’s argument that Westerners had now reached the point of appointing ambassadors to China who had just been involved in the partition of Africa, “the idea being that this state [of China] could only be managed in the way Africa had been.”¹¹⁹ Following up on Liang’s rhetoric about the West’s treatment of China, he writes:

these Westerners shame us, slight us, treat us as stupid and boorish, and consider us lazy without end—but how come there is no sudden awakening (added in the MS: but we still consider partition an empty threat?!)¹²⁰

彼西人之辱我、賤我、頑擴我、尸居我者，無乎不至矣、奈之何不遽然寤、(而猶以瓜分為讐言也)?!

Tang, like Liang, had closely followed the translations and summaries from the foreign papers and he was aware that there were strong forces in the West favoring the territorial integrity of China even if the Qing court

117 Tang Caichang, Section “Guafen zhi yi” 瓜分之議 [The discussion about *guafen*] in his “Geguo caiji shiqing lunzheng” 各國猜忌實情論證 [Exposition of the true situation of the suspicions prevailing among the different (Western) nations], *Xiangxue bao* 21 and 22 (1897). The article is unsigned; the identification of the author is based on the edition of his works after his death. This edition is based on the manuscripts and there is some deviation from the *Xiangxue bao* print, which are pointed out in the text in *Tang Caichang ji*, 119–127. The quotations refer to this edition.

118 *Ibid.*, 121.

119 “其意謂之國也，非以非洲之道治之，弗治也，” *ibid.*, 122.

120 *Ibid.*, 122.

did not seem to care. The desire of these reformers to mobilize patriotic fervor, however, made sure that advocacy rather than fact-based analysis was driving their characterization of the West.

The translations of foreign articles on partition, which had appeared in the reform press managed by Liang himself, already presented quite a different picture. Especially the English-language press strongly objected to a partition of China. These objections were less based on a commitment to preserve Chinese sovereignty than on a commitment to preserve the balance of power as well as secure a stable environment for trade. Japan had already been forced to give back the Liaodong peninsula shortly after China had ceded it in the Shimonoseki Treaty in 1895. A stronghold especially of Russia on Chinese soil would substantially upset the equilibrium.

As the partition of China was discussed internationally and *guafen* had become the standard translation of the process, this term was now occasionally used even by papers outside the reformers' media circle, such as the *Shenbao*. In September 1898, at the height of the Hundred Days Reform, the *Shenbao* printed an editorial that was bluntly and critically entitled "Partitioning China is NOT the Ultimate Aim of the Different Western States."¹²¹ After China's ambassador to London, Zeng Jize, had published "China. The Sleep and the Awakening" in January 1887 in the *Asiatic Quarterly*, this article claimed, the Western "discussion about a partition of China had stopped because people saw that China was not lacking in real men."¹²² After the country's defeat in the war with Japan, however, this discussion had resumed. The Western states, the article claimed, were not interested in partitioning China but in maintaining balance of power and securing commercial access. This answers the rhetorical question that the article posed: "Why is it that, given China's weakness and depression, none of the states that set out to dismember it succeeded?"¹²³ With the impending completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway, which would allow Russia to quickly ferry troops to the Far East, Russia's hold on Manchuria, however, was bound to increase. This explains the 1897 rush of Germany, England, and France to put small sections of coastal China under their control.

121 "Lun guafen Zhongguo fei Taixi geguo zhi benxin" 論瓜分中國非泰西各國之本心, *Shenbao*, September 16, 1898, 1

122 "中國未嘗無人。瓜分之議由此稍息," *ibid.*

123 "以疲弱不振的中國，無論何國起意分割，何求而不得," *ibid.*

If [the other powers] did not use the remaining time to occupy a piece of Chinese territory, they would not only be unable to compete with Russia but would not even be safe themselves.

苟非乘間多佔中國土地，非特不能與俄角逐，并無以爲自全之計。

The Powers' refusal to grant any one power the upper hand in China was "not necessarily bad for China,"¹²⁴ but the real challenge would come once the Russian railway had been completed. "This will be the moment of partition!"¹²⁵ Looking at the Russian repression of the Poles and the strict rule the British had established in India, one might expect the worst after such a partition. However, Poland and India "probably brought about this disaster themselves by being weak in power and short in wisdom."¹²⁶ China, the *Shenbao* editorial assured, was different. "With its spiritual inheritance, vast territory and rich resources, it has great potential" [中國以神明之胄，地廣、物博，大可有爲]，but it can only avoid "becoming meat for others on the butcher's block" [爲人砧上之肉] if it "gets itself to bounce back" [使中國而克自振拔]. This would have to rely on the "commitment of people of good will and valor" [仁人志士之用心] over many years to strengthen the nation.

Written a week before the coup that ended this first round of the Chinese reform effort in 1898, the article shows that the basic thrust of the reform discourse had—for the moment—moved into the mainstream. It did not take up, however, Liang Qichao's critique of the imperial examination system's waste of Chinese talent or his call to the unpolluted youth to take a stand. The *Shenbao* article agreed that there was a looming crisis, that China had as yet shown itself incapable of doing anything about it, and that it therefore lacked agency in determining the fate of its territory.

The widespread discussion of a partition of China reflected a perception of the country weakness that was shared by foreigners, the Qing court, as well as the court's Chinese critics. They considered this internal weakness to be the result of internal causes such as widespread illiteracy and ignorance about the world, venality, a dysfunctional examination system, the resistance against reforms, and the split between the "Tartar" (Manchu) rulers and the Han Chinese majority. This internal weakness was seen as so pervasive that many believed the Powers had a responsibility to prevent China's collapse, and thus utter chaos and waves of refugees. One of the scenarios proposed to secure the viability of this polity was to give

124 "非必有所惡於中國也," *ibid.*

125 "剖分之期其在是乎," *ibid.*

126 "彼二國者細於勢力、短於智慧，致蹈此禍猶可言也," *ibid.*

the Powers a strong role in the development of “zones of influence” in the country for which they would be in charge. Demetrius Boulger’s 1897 article about China as “The Sick Man of the Far East” was instrumental in providing a rationale for this scenario. He wrote:

The general view of China now, it would be scarcely going too far to say, is not merely that she is a *quantité négligeable*, but that she will have to obey the dictates of others and thus surrender the power to work out her own destiny. Unless the Chinese awake to the gravity of their situation there will be no resisting the accuracy of that conclusion.¹²⁷

This was instantly picked up by Western papers, Chinese reformers, as well as foreigners writing in Chinese and ethnic Chinese writing in English. Its association with the Ottoman Empire (the “weak man of the Bosphorus”) was seen as an accurate metaphorical conceptualization of the state of China’s affairs, and it was combined with other metaphorical concepts such as China being “asleep,” being a “sleeping giant,” or a “sleeping lion.”¹²⁸

Once Kang Youwei had come into personal contact with the Guangxu emperor in 1898, he tried to establish the *guafen* narrative and the agenda it implied—both of which he and his friends had already tried to spread among the public—within the language of the political center. He did so by writing for the Guangxu Emperor in 1898 an extensive narrative of the partition of Poland entitled *Bolan fenmie ji* 波蘭分滅記 (Record of Poland’s partition and demise).¹²⁹ This manuscript is Kang’s companion piece to two essays from his hand on successful reforms, which he submitted at the same time, the “Investigation on the Japanese political reforms,” and the “Record of Peter of Russia’s political reforms.”¹³⁰ With constant explicit references to China, his essay on Poland described

127 Demetrius Boulger, “The Sick Man of the Far East,” *The New Century Review* II.10 (1897): 258.

128 On this metaphor, see R. Wagner, “China “Asleep” and “Awakening.”

129 The manuscript was thought to have been destroyed after Kang Youwei ended up on the most wanted list following the Hundred Days Reform in late September 1898, but a manuscript copy survives in the Beijing Palace Museum and the text was finally published in 2007. Kang Youwei, *Bolan fenmie ji* 波蘭分滅記 [Record of Poland’s partition and demise], in *Kang Youwei quanji* 康有為全集 [Kang Youwei collected works], edited by Jiang Yihua and Zhang Ronghua (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), vol. 4, 393–424.

130 Kang Youwei, *Riben bianzheng kao* 日本辯證考 [Investigation on the Japanese political reforms] and *E Bide bianzheng ji* 俄彼得變政記 [Record of Peter of Russia’s political reforms]. All three essays have been included in *Kang Youwei quanji*, but have also been published in a single volume, see Kang Youwei, *Riben bianzheng kao* 日本變政考, edited by Jiang Yihua 姜義華 and Zhang Ronghua 張榮華 (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2011).

Russia's greed and cunning strategy in achieving Poland's partition by seemingly "sweet" words. Above all, however, the text focused on the conservative and utterly ignorant Polish nobility who were blocking all the efforts by the open-minded king and the reform-prone lower levels of the aristocracy. They would rather see the country perish than lose their privileges and power. A ruler had to be bold and daring to counter such forces, otherwise he will end up like the Polish king who had tried to accommodate all sides.¹³¹ Kang was not shy to spell out the lessons: A new office should be established to manage fundamental reform and it should be staffed by "young people of valour" rather than the old conservatives. Such reforms would be the only certain way to prevent a partition of the country, because they would strengthen it in the manner in which the reforms by Peter the Great and the Meiji Emperor had secured the unity and rise of their countries. China was in a critical moment. The Polish lesson is directly applied to China:

If one wants to do reforms for purposes of self-strengthening, it is best to go about it as early as possible; if one wants to protect one's country so as to secure its independence, it is best not to rely on others [e.g. foreign countries as the Poles had done]. That Liaodong peninsula, which belongs to our homeland, now *de facto* under Russian power, is due to its being lost because of the [Trans-Siberian] Railway, and this year we have handed over [the cities of] Lüshun and Dalian, at every step there are obstacles—we are not much different from Poland! Nowadays, our nobility and high officials do not agree to open a Systems Office to [manage] reforms. In principle there is still some hope if we do it now, but if it is deferred by just a few years, the Russian railway in the Northwest will be completed and they will steadily push southward and if we then want to draw a constitution, I am afraid that they will pressure us to keep to the old laws and will not tolerate [reforms as they had done in Poland]. Are we their Poland and are not those conservatives who block reforms helping the Russians by partitioning ourselves?¹³²

欲變法自強者，宜早為計；欲保國自立者，宜勿依人。我遼東之歸地，實籍俄力，而以鐵路輸之，今歲則以旅、大與之。動輒沮撓，我之不為波蘭者幾希！今我貴族大臣，未肯開制度局以變法也。夫及今為之，猶或可望。稍遲數年，東北俄路

131 For a summary of the content, see Kong Xiangxi 孔祥吉, "Cong <Bolan fenmie ji> kan Kang Youwei wuxu bianfa shiqi de zhengzhi zhuzhang" 從《波蘭分滅記》看康有為戊戌變法時期的政治主張 [Kang Youwei's political propositions during the Hundred Days Reform period seen from his <Record of Poland's Partition and Demise>], *Renwen zazhi* 5 (1982): 80–84.

132 Kang Youwei, *Bolan fenmie ji*, 397, 412.

既成，長驅南下，于是而我乃欲草定憲法，恐有勤令守舊法而不許者矣 然則吾其為波蘭乎？而凡守舊阻撓變法者，非助俄自分治乎？

Kang was not shy to spell out the lessons: A new office should be established to manage fundamental reform and it should be staffed by “young people of valour” rather than the old conservatives. Kang’s basic assessment of the relevance of the Polish example is contained after another summary of the similarities between the strategies used by the Powers in the partitions of Poland and those used by them for China at present in the phrase “We ourselves truly are Poland!” (*wo zhenshi Bolan* 我真是波蘭).¹³³ The two companion pieces on the reforms of Peter the Great and the Meiji Emperor established the antonym for Kang Youwei’s use of the term “partition,” namely the defense of a state’s cohesiveness and the enhancement of its strength through modernization by a monarch from an established dynasty.

Banking on the victor’s dilemma: China is too big to be allowed to fail

As stated above, the view of an asymmetry of power which assumes that the stronger party—in this case the Powers—has all the freedom and the weaker—in this case the “Sick Man of Asia”—all the burden is rarely supported by reality. Britain was caught in the victor’s dilemma.

During the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, when it was becoming clear that the Qing fleet would suffer defeat, Wolseley—the previously mentioned probable author of the 1860 pamphlet “The Partition of China”—had summarized long-standing British concerns about a collapse of the Chinese government in a widely referenced article. He recalled the negotiations in 1860 after the Second Opium War, in which he himself had been involved:

In fact, our commercial relations with China bound us up with the maintenance of the Imperial authority, because it alone would and could protect the native producers. This was so much the case that, next to the defeat of our invading army, the greatest misfortune which, commercially speaking, could overtake us, would be a great victory. We wished to mend, not to end, the Imperial government. These considerations were never absent from the minds of those who directed our war of 1860. But it is not often in the history of war that we find the aggrieved side impelled in its own interests to strike, so to say, with a gloved hand, lest the blow delivered should kill outright.¹³⁴

133 Ibid., 412.

134 Viscount Wolseley, “China and Japan,” *The Cosmopolitan*, February, 1895, 420.

Wolsey defined British interests as primarily commercial. It was therefore strongly in favour of a Chinese authority able to secure an orderly environment for trade. The Qing was on the verge of collapse under the onslaught first of the Taiping and Nian rebels within the country, and now of the British and French. In this situation, the British Prime Minister Viscount Palmerston had decided to prop up the dynasty and offered indirect military support against the Taiping Christian rebels; in return he only demanded exceedingly modest reparations. Britain was utterly disinterested in assuming the burden and the cost of securing a safe environment for its China trade. India after the 1857 Sepoy uprising was quite enough. This shows a victorious power in the quandary about trying to prevent the collapse of its opponent, by supporting the integrity of the territory under its control and its capacity to maintain social order. The collapse of Chinese social order and an ensuing fragmentation would not only hurt regular trade, it would upset the balance of power and set in motion waves of refugees with unforeseeable and definitely unpleasant consequences.

Two weeks after the coup that ended the Hundred Days Reform in 1898, the *Shenbao* published another editorial to assess the new situation. The article does not deny that China was in critical danger but replaces the safety previously promised by reforms and new personnel with an appeal to mobilize people's "hearts," because

if people's hearts are firmly set, then everyone will love their country with the same heart that loves their family, wife and children, and this is how the country is kept safe.¹³⁵

人心固則人人以愛身家愛妻子之心愛其國，而國以常存矣

In his 1898 *Encouragement to Study*, (*Qianxue pian* 強學篇), Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909) chose a similar line of argument: "Our dynasty and state are firmly anchored," he writes, "they have been made grand by heaven, there is no question that they will be supported."¹³⁶ After depicting the catastrophic results "if indeed things came about as [predicted] in the absurd talk about the Westerners partitioning [China]" (假使果如西人瓜分之妄說), he concludes—just like the *Shenbao* did in October 1898—with:

135 "Lun Zhongguo yi yi gujie renxin wei yaotu" 論中國宜以固結人心為要圖 [China has to make uniting people's hearts a priority], *Shenbao*, October 8, 1898.

136 "我朝邦深固，天之所物，必有與立矣。" Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, *Qianxue pian* 勸學篇 [Encouragement to study] (Wuchang: Lianghu shudian, 1898), Neipian, chapter Tongxin 同心.

In this situation it is the first duty to show deference to the court and to protect the altars of the nation by mobilizing loyalty and love, and striving for the wealth and power (of the country).¹³⁷

今日時局，惟以激發忠愛、講求富強，尊朝廷、衛社稷為第一義

This argument comes in the opening chapter, which is appropriately entitled “Being of one mind” (*tongxin* 同心).

Zhang Zhidong, the reformers, and the *Shenbao* had one important argument in common. They all assumed that the ultimate agency in China’s march to wealth and power lay not in structural reform but in “the hearts and minds of the Chinese” (*xin* 心). From the appeals we have seen, this *xin* was in need of a fundamental remake although there was disagreement about the ideal features of such a reformed *xin* and the best candidates to develop them. While the notion that much “energy of the mind” (*xinli* 心力) was needed to solve an urgent personal or national matter had been quite common, this argument received a substantial boost and twist through an unexpected North American argumentative resource that had been made available in Chinese directly after the Sino-Japanese War, Henry Wood’s *Ideal Suggestion Through Mental Photography*.¹³⁸ At the time, Wood was a key figure in the New Thought Movement in the United States, in which the Christian Science communities originate. The “mental photography” in the title suggests that one should set up a mental image of how one would like to be, and then emulate this. The 1896 translation by John Fryer¹³⁹ recommended it as a way to overcome Chinese problems such as opium addiction, but as Liu Jihui 劉紀蕙 has shown in a number of fine studies, its notion of *xinli* 心力—the power of the heart/mind to change reality—became an important feature in the arsenal of public reform argumentation.¹⁴⁰ It suited the agenda of those who were frustrated by the apparent lack of patriotic commitment among the Chinese and by the country’s lack of the wealth and power that would command respect in the world. China, they thought, was in a crisis that needed an urgent solution and it could only come from a revitalized “power of the heart/mind.” They recast the option explained in Wood’s book to get help from a teacher in

137 Ibid.

138 Henry Wood, *Ideal Suggestion Through Mental Photography* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1893).

139 [Henry Wood], *Zhixin mianbing fa* 治心免病法 [A method to get rid of disease by regulating one’s mind], translated by Jonathan Fryer (Shanghai: Gezhi shushi, 1896).

140 Liu Jihui, *Xin de tuomu. 1895 shijian hou de lilun chonggou* 心的拓樸. 1895事件後的理論重構 [The way to the heart’s simplicity. Reconstructing theory after the 1895 events] (Taipei: Xingren wenhua shiyanshi, 2011).

setting up such a model for oneself. The Chinese reformer or the state managed by him would cast the ideal features that the people were to live up to in order to become true citizens with the appropriate patriotic commitment that was strong enough to safeguard the country.

In the September 1898 article referred to above, however, the *Shenbao*, had already indicated a different option. Saying that the efforts by the Western powers to maintain the balance of power was “not necessarily bad for China,” it had suggested that China’s territorial integrity might indeed be protected by some of the Western powers trying to prevent Russia from dominating China. In the discussion about the danger of China’s partition, foreigners such as Wade and Wolseley, reformers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, and commercial newspapers such as the *Shenbao* all presented their case. No explicit strategic assessment of this kind, however, is known from the Qing court for this period. The practical steps taken by the Qing court, however, to keep the different powers on board with grants of long-term leases indicate that the court actually—if implicitly—had a strategy to rely on these Western conflicts of interests rather than a rise in the hard-to-manage patriotism of their countrymen.¹⁴¹ This indeed was also the assumption of some of the Western diplomats at the time. In May 1899, the British Legation Secretary in Peking, Henry Bax-Ironside, wrote to the British Foreign Minister, the Marquess of Salisbury: “China apparently prefers to consider the mutual jealousies of the various powers as the best safeguard.”¹⁴² An imagined exchange between two Chinese officials that was featured in the American satirical journal *Puck* in August 1900 also drives home this point (figure 3).

The assumption that the contradictions between the foreign powers and their interest to maintain a balance was the best guarantee for China’s territorial integrity had been ventilated since the 1860s. As quoted above, the *North China Herald* wrote in 1866, “[China’s] greatest safety lies in the

141 A widely quoted report based on a December 1897 Dalziel’s Telegrams dispatch from Shanghai refers to a “recent conference” in the *Zongli Yamen*, which took the place of a Chinese foreign office, on the concessions to the Powers. It indicates that the *Zongli Yamen* shared the concerns about a partition of China but opted for a strategy of limited concessions to all the Powers to maintain the stalemate among them. The dispatch seems to have been based on an unquoted inside source. Prince Gong, who headed the *Zongli Yamen*, was reported to have proposed to “extend immediate recognition to the claims” of Germany in Shandong. This “course was necessary to save the rest of the country from dismemberment.” He went into great detail about the parts that would be taken by the different countries. The dispatch is quoted in “The Partition of China,” *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, December 18, 1897, 2.

142 Bax-Ironside to Marquess of Salisbury, FO 17/1384, May 20, 1899, 5.



Fig. 3: "Their only chance," Puck, August 1900, 48.

fact that neither of the four nations most interested in its trade would allow the others to gain an advantage it did not share; and, to avoid a general partition, all will refrain from encroaching."¹⁴³ The nervous concern of the Western powers that a collapse of China would lead to a war among them had now, it seems, become part of a silent Chinese government calculus. It assumed that China was too big to be allowed to fail and that therefore the Powers would be willing to step in and prevent this by providing credits and preventing any one power from becoming dominant and colonizing parts or all of China. As we shall see, there was merit in this assumption.

The quandaries of the *guafen* narrative

When the end of the Hundred Days Reform was followed by the coup of the Empress Dowager Cixi on September 21, 1898, the reformers had

143 "Retrospect of Events in China during 1866," *North China Herald*, December 29, 1866, 206.

to abandon, for the time being, the hope for a top-down reform supported by the—now sequestered—Guangxu Emperor and a range of high officials. These reforms, Kang Youwei had argued, were the best and only way to enhance China's agency and to prevent a partition. In the narrative presented by Kang Youwei to the Emperor with the *Report about the Partition and Demise of Poland*, the foreign powers and the local conservatives objectively interacted in promoting partition by blocking reforms. After the coup, the hopes for reforms coming from the court were dashed with the main responsibility for China's threatening demise now lodged with the conservatives among China's "nobility and high officials." The reform papers set up in Japan and Macao now translated articles from the foreign press which showed that the Powers had set great hopes that reforms would stabilize China. Since the coup, danger of partition had increased because the opinion gained ground that China had to be saved from its own incompetent government through a partition after which each of the Powers would secure stability and a good environment for trade in their respective domains.¹⁴⁴ One of the proposals published directly before the coup had suggested to defer the partition by ten years under the condition that the government would implement the very reforms which the coup was about to crush two weeks later.¹⁴⁵

From the outset, the reformers had followed a two-pronged strategy: first, to mobilize the public—the most promising segments being increasingly urbanized, educated, young men—to exert pressure on officialdom, and second, to seek alliances with and protection from high officials open to reforms, foreigners in Chinese employ, Protestant missionaries, and foreign politicians. With the coup, much of the second option (the missionaries and foreigners remained sympathetic) seemed lost for now, which had important consequences for their advocacy strategy in terms of argument, addressees, and the media used.

Guafen, they now argued, was a result of Chinese officialdom selling out rather than of Western greed. In May 1899, well after the end of the Hundred Days reform, Liang Qichao, who was familiar with Wolseley's

144 One of these translations was based on an article on January 12, 1899 in the *Hong Kong Telegraph*. It quoted the New York *Xiluobao* 喜羅報 (New York Herald?) article saying "since the opening of foreign trade, the foreigners had hoped for a reform in China," but "now [after the coup] they still have kept to the old ways" and people were as miserable as before. "There is no other way to save [the Chinese] than by foreign [powers each] taking control over a part of the country," even though they had little interest in this. "Yigeng guafen" 議梗瓜分, [On an outline for partition], *Zhixin bao* 45, GX 24, second month, first day (February 21, 1899), 16.

145 "The Possible Recovery of China," *North China Herald*, September 5, 1898.

article, recast his partition narrative with another programmatic article, “Warnings about Partition” (*Guafen weiyán* 瓜分危言).¹⁴⁶ For a short time, Liang had been an insider in the court’s closed information system. After his ouster and forced exile to Japan, he now made use of his inside information to fully move the *guafen* narrative from focusing the blame on evil intentions of foreign powers to the shady machinations of the Qing court. “Warnings about Partition” was to become a key retroactive building block for later historical narratives of the period between 1895 and 1898. When this essay appeared in the *Qingyi bao* 清議報 [English title: *The China Critic*], the paper Liang now published from his Japanese exile, the international controversy about China’s partition, the powers juggling for position, and the press coverage of both had reached a high point. Liang’s summary introduction begins:

For several decades now, the Westerners have been discussing the partitioning of China. And it is now ten years that informed Chinese know about this partitioning and have been concerned about it. These one of two informed men, however, rush around the country sweating and panting, shouting madly in their dedication to a path [out of this crisis], but those stupid snorers in their sleep [the government bureaucrats, R. W.] arrogantly block their ears and do not pay attention. And if they do, they drop the matter with a laugh and do not mind in the least bit while these foreigners are on full alert, scheming incessantly without neglecting the smallest detail. [According to these government bureaucrats], even if parts [of China’s sphere of control such as Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, Burma, Vietnam and Korea, R. W.] should be cut off, this [loss] still would be nothing more than that of property beyond the national borders. For a big and civilized nation, this would not even suffice to hurt the very tips of its hair. Whereupon these snoring sleepers become ever more pompous, and, full of themselves and pompously, ask where proof of such intentions or actions of the Westerners [towards a partitioning of China proper] could be found?! Such [claims, they say] are nothing but panicky words of exaggeration by people who, with provocative words, are sowing political trouble.

146 Aishi ke 哀時客 [A guest grieved about the time] (=Liang Qichao, “Guafen weiyán” 瓜分危言 [Warnings about partition], *Qingyi bao* 15 (May 1899): 1–4; 16 (June 1899): 1–5; 17 (July 1899): 1–5; 23 (1899): 1–7. Here quoted from the reproduction in Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi wenji leibian, shang, shiju* 飲冰室文集類編 上, 時局 [Classified writings from the Ice-Drinker’s Studio, A, Contemporary situation] (Tōkyō, Shimokōbe Hangorō, 1904).

Woe! These one or two knowledgeable people were wearing out their tongues and cheeks, and exhausting their blood and tears, and still were not able to awaken even the smallest portion of the dreaming crowd! As time wore on, they themselves felt that their words were worn-out clichés and commonplaces and they did not want to place them any further between their cheeks and teeth. But then, not long ago, there were the Kiaotschou, Lü shun/Dalian Bay, Weihaiwei, Guangzhou Bay affairs [of Germany, Russia, Great Britain, and France, all successfully demanding leases in 1897–1898]. Within a single year, these strategic points were all lost and the manifold domestic privileges concerning railways and mines were all given to foreign hands. Not long ago, this trifle of a state that is Italy came up with a request for the Sanmen Bay and these pipsqueaks like Austria, Belgium, and Denmark all thought of taking their cut greedily one after the other in a rush and tumult that has not ended to this very day (557).

西人之議瓜分中國也，數十年於茲矣。中國有識者，知瓜分而自憂之也，十年於茲矣。顧此一二之識者，且汗且喘走天下，疾呼長號，以徇於路，而彼啞啞鼾睡者，褻然充耳，而無所聞矣，而一笑置之，不小介意，而彼西人者亦復深沈審慎，處心積慮，不輕於一發。雖有割割，亦不過境外之屬土，於堂堂大國，曾不足以損其毫末。於是此鼾睡者亦復囂然，自安自大，謂西人曷嘗有此心。有此事，不過莠言亂政之徒，為危詞以聳聽耳。嗚呼痛哉！此一二有識者唇舌俱敝，血淚俱盡，曾不足以醒群夢於萬一，久之久之，亦漸覺其言為老生常談，司空見慣，不欲復以置於齒頰間矣。乃曾幾何時，而有膠州之事，有旅順、大連灣、威海衛、廣州灣之事，一年之內要害盡失，而鐵路、礦務、內治種種之權利，盡歸他國之手。曾幾何時，而意大利區區之國，且有三門灣之請，奧大利、比利時、丹麥彈丸黑子，皆思染指，眈眈逐逐，岌岌泯泯，以至於日，驚魂未定。

The officials claim that the threat of partition does not exist because it could have happened for a long time, but did not come about. The people are asleep, oblivious to the crisis of the country, and even the few reformers who are trying to wake them up—a reference to Liang himself and his teacher Kang Youwei—tire of their own ineffective words. The actual text after this introduction then takes up the “big mystery” why the Westerners have not gone about executing *guafen* on any larger scale:

The Westerners have been talking about partition for decades, but until today we have not seen them actually going about it. [...] Although I am not wondering whether this be so, once their power was applied to China, it would have been like opening a boil with a bow weighing a thousand *jun*—there is nothing they could not get if they only wanted it. That they invariably procrastinated and let

China remain in this decay for decades is without question one of the great mysteries of the world (558).

瓜分之事，西人言之既數十年，而至今未見實行 [。。。] 雖然吾無怪其然，夫以泰西各國之力，加於中國，如以千鈞之弩潰癰。苟其欲之，則何求而不得，而必蹉跎蹉跎，令中因保此殘喘越數十載，不可謂非世界上之一大疑案也。

Liang had no illusions about the patriotic fervour of either China's people or the readiness of her elites to rush to the defense of the nation, but he also maintained that the Powers really wanted to partition China. "That this partition has not come about is neither due to a lack of a desire for it by the Europeans, nor the strength of the Chinese to resist it."¹⁴⁷ While he castigates the "conservatives" (*shoujiuzhe* 守舊者) for going straight back to sleep after concluding that there was no intention by the Westerners to partition China and that this was just a story invented by radicals to sow dissent and create chaos, Liang acknowledges that they had a point by spending the entire essay on salvaging his *guafen* narrative. This narrative was essential to anchor his call for a drastic change along the lines of the American War of Independence or the French Revolution that would both save the nation and show the way to a future marked by wealth and power.¹⁴⁸

Liang's new *guafen* narrative focuses on one main point. "China brought the partition upon herself" (582) (*Zhongguo zi qu guafen zhi you* 中國自取瓜分之由). While in the earlier article the foreigners held the main agency in the partition, the central cause now lies within China. In fact, his argument follows a general rule for which he quotes the

147 "此瓜分之事未見實行，非歐人無瓜分之心，亦非中國人有抗拒瓜分之力，" *ibid.*, 559.

148 Writing that Chinese reformers were recasting their country in a "newly articulated world space of shared colonial experience that was everywhere, and thus [. . .] defined the modern itself," Rebecca Karl has suggested that Liang and his entourage were recasting China since the early 1900s in what later would be called a third world environment with a shared experience of colonialism and rebellion, see *Staging the World*, 106. While indeed references to colonization as the most radical form of "undoing a state" 亡國 and to rebellions such as the Philippine and Boer wars abound, the historical record does not seem to support the argument. We shall see further down that in a broad array of contemporary Chinese sources that range from essays to plays to political novels and cartoons, the focus in the discussion is on the internal causes for the loss of sovereignty and efforts to secure or regain it. Examples given in these sources for the loss of sovereignty include bona fide "Western" states such as Poland, Ireland, and Spain as well as "third world" countries such as India and Egypt, while those for gaining or securing it included the United States and Japan as well as the efforts in this direction in the Philippines and Transvaal. The early twentieth century Chinese political novels include translations of such works from the Japanese (by Liang Qichao, among others), which sometimes depict actual meetings of exiled reformers from these oppressed countries (under the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia!) where they share their stories and assure each other of their sympathy. See, Catherine V. Yeh, *The Chinese Political Novel. Migration of a World Genre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 315.

authority of the Confucian thinker *Mengzi*: “A state has to attack itself, only then will others attack it.” (*guo bi zi fa, ranhou ren fa zhi* 國必自伐，然後人伐之). The examples: “The demise of India was brought about by the Rajas, not the British. The demise of Poland was brought about by the [Polish] nobility, not Russia, Prussia and Austria.”¹⁴⁹ To prove the point for China, Liang Qichao uses what now might be called a “Wikileaks” technique, namely making inside information from the top layer of the court public. Here, we hear for the first the ever since endlessly repeated story that the Chinese navy had not lost the war because the different segments were under provincial command and the officials in charge were not willing to risk their fleet by joining with the others, but because funds needed for the navy had been siphoned off to pay for Empress Dowager Cixi’s Summer Palace. Once the war was lost, reparations had to be paid to Japan for not keeping the Liaodong Peninsula. The Russian ambassador, the leaks showed, had worked with Germany to prevent Japan from getting a foothold on the continent and he gained Empress Dowager Cixi’s ear by suggesting that the only two surviving autocracies, Russia and China, should work together because “if people’s rights become stronger, those of the ruler decline” (*minquan xing ze junquan ti* 民權興則君權替), and that any “political reform would be a boon to the Han Chinese and a misfortune for the Manchu” (581) (*bianfazhe, Hanren zhi fu, Manren zhi huo ye* 變法者，漢人之福，滿人之禍也). The secret treaty concluded by Li Hongzhang on Empress Dowager Cixi’s orders in St. Petersburg had provided a credit for China to pay Japan, and in turn guaranteed Russia exclusive rights in Manchuria including the Liaodong Peninsula. This secret treaty, which Liang quotes in great detail, set off the 1897–1898 scramble of the other countries down to such “midgets as Italy” to secure beachheads for themselves so as to be able to maintain a balance of power. The Guangxu Emperor, Liang writes, had been adamantly opposed to this treaty, but he had been sidelined by the Empress Dowager who together with Li Hongzhang, Sun Yuwen 孫毓汶, and Xu Yongyi 徐用儀 must share the “blame” for bringing about China’s partition (580–581). The third and last piece in this self-inflicted disaster was Cixi’s coup in 1898, because it meant the end of the reforms that would have strengthened China to the point of her being able to resist partition.

While this is a substantial narrative with many strengths, it had yet to explain what actually happened with the threatened partition. To salvage the narrative, Liang introduced a difference between a manifest and an

149 “亡印度者印度之酋長也，非英人也。亡波蘭者波蘭之貴族，非俄、普、奧也。” “Guafen weiyán,” 579.

invisible partition. Since the former did not come about, he claimed that the invisible partition was already going on and that it was much worse because people were not aware of it and would not rebel (576). “The partition without visible form is even more tragic than the manifest partition” (575) (*wuxing zhi guafen geng can yu youxing zhi guafen* 無形之瓜分更慘於有形之瓜分). The Chinese discussion about the partition of the country was to gain much of its appeal from the concreteness of a revived “dividing up the melon” image.

In its historical and vernacular use, dividing up the melon had always meant that the parts were becoming the full property of the new owner. However, the Chinese treaties with Russia, Germany, England, and France, already involved time-limited leases rather than the cessation of territory, and the rights that were being negotiated now for railway development or mining were not establishing any permanent political control either. Liang seems to have been aware that his narrative was losing stringency and power with this differentiation between two kinds of partition. So while he claimed that these indirect forms of control were “a new form of annihilating a nation” (575) (*wang guo zhi xin fa* 亡國之新法), he also maintained that directly after the coup in September 1898 the Western powers resumed hatching plans for an actual “peaceful partition.” He was referring to a detailed report—relayed from the Japanese journal *Hansei Zasshi* 反省雜誌 (*Hansard's Review*)—in English papers about an international “Peace Conference for the Partition of China,” which he called *Guafen Zhongguo heping hui* 瓜分中國和平會, that was to negotiate the details of the partition, which was to entail the different Powers taking sovereign control and an agreement to ban any arms manufacturing by Chinese (565).¹⁵⁰ The story was a canard, but the fact that Liang went for it highlights his desire to keep the threat of an actual partition alive.

The reaction to his accusing—by name—Empress Dowager Cixi and Li Hongzhang as the ultimate culprits of China’s partition evoked a strong reaction. A *Shenbao* editorial in December 1899 showed the impact which

150 This conference had been proposed by a Shōsō Akimoto, about whom nothing more seems to be known. It is outlined in the English-language article “The Peaceful Partition of China,” in the Japanese periodical *Hansei zasshi* XIII.3, March 1898, 105–108. Akimoto suggested that sharing in the peaceful partition of China to spread civilization through Asia would save the European powers from drifting to war with each other. A similar conference was proposed on September 1, 1899, by the *North China Herald*. It was to set a trajectory and a timeline for Chinese reforms within ten years. Failure to implement them would result in the Powers partitioning China. It was meant to put “a fresh heart into the reformers in China.” “The Possible Recovery in China,” *North China Herald*, September 5, 1899, 430.

this and similar articles by Liang had in China even while he was in exile in Japan.¹⁵¹ It simply claimed that Liang was spreading fake news. "The rebel Liang Qichao has now been selling this *Qingyi bao* (China Discussion) for a year," it started, "some ignorant people put up the capital for it and those who buy and read it are treated to things without a base in fact" (逆犯梁啓超所爲之清議報行銷市上已歷一年，無識之徒間有出資，購閱者案其逆蹟所在約有數端). The *Qingyi bao*'s attacks on the court, high officials, and government policies were to instigate rebellion, and Liang was only "afraid that chaos in China might not come quickly enough. [. . .] His constantly inveighing against the flaws of the nation so as to encourage the powers to use their troops is only concerned that the partition of China might not come quickly enough" (惟恐中國禍亂不速 [. . .] 日構宗邦之失以勸列強用兵，惟恐中國瓜分不驟). In other words, the *Shenbao* editorial now accused Liang of hoping for a partition of China to prove his point of the court's responsibility for it. The article went into its own Wikileaks mode by divulging that the "rebels" Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao had actually planned to call on foreign soldiers to surround the Summer Palace where Empress Dowager Cixi was staying (and preparing for a coup of her own). Worse, they had planned not only to get rid of Cixi, but also of the Emperor himself whom they claimed to protect.¹⁵² The *Shenbao* article shows that Liang's description of the motives imputed to him by officials for warning of an in-existent threat of partition was to the point. They indeed accused him of radical talk to instigate rebellion and chaos, which would bring about exactly what it claimed to try to forestall.

Liang's agenda had two sides: to convince readers of the *guafen* threat, and to "civilize" the coming generation of Chinese into true "citizens" by instilling into their minds all that was "new" (*xin* 新), a key term made fashionable by Liang's writings. It rejected the "old" Chinese knowledge and institutions while setting up the "reforms," the "new," of the civilized West for emulation.¹⁵³ Civilized "reformed citizens" (*xinmin* 新民), he assumed, would devote themselves quite naturally to the cause of the nation. The introduction of civilized knowledge had already been on the agenda of the "study societies" as well as the newspapers and journals published by reformers before 1898. Scholarship, however,

151 It also shows the willingness even of independent papers to adjust to the rhetoric of the court.

152 "Zonglun Qingyi bao wu shang zhi zui" 綜論清議報誣 上之罪 [A summary assessment of the *Qingyi bao*'s crime of maligning the court], *Shenbao*, December 28, 1899.

153 While an adjective in the modern vernacular, the *xin* 新 [new] was mostly used as a transitive verb well into the twentieth century with the meaning "to renew, to reform." Scholarship has largely overlooked this as in the frequent rendering of the element *xin Zhongguo* 新中國 in the title of Liang's novel *Xin Zhongguo weilaji* as *The Future of New China* instead of *Future Record of China's Reform*.

has exaggerated the actual impact of the reformers because they were cast as the heroes of the time in the PRC master narrative about the demise of the Qing dynasty. The introduction of new knowledge actually occurred on a much broader basis than that managed by the reformers. The main channels were commercially distributed encyclopaedic collections,¹⁵⁴ encyclopaedic dictionaries such as the *Xin Erya* (New Erya 新爾雅),¹⁵⁵ and new schoolbooks, but also long theoretical diatribes in political novels and plays. The implied—and shared—assumption was that this new knowledge would quite naturally engage people in reform and rouse national feelings.

The young, educated, male, and mostly urban audiences, which had already made their appearance as China's ultimate hope in Liang's 1897 article discussed above, were far from ready for the role they were supposed to assume. They needed, Liang argued, a fundamental remolding. For the time being, the harsh measures of the court against reformers associated with Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao after 1898 had led to a disappearance of many of the "study societies" as well as the publications they had supported, as they were banned or disbanded before they were banned. The reformers tried to fill the void with new, strongly political associations set up abroad and with publications that came out beyond the reach of the Qing court (in Shanghai, Japan, Macao, Hong Kong, and the West), but could circulate in China. As had already happened before 1898, these efforts, however, were again part of a wider development of what Mary Rankin has called local "elite activism."¹⁵⁶ The reformers did not control this activism, it did not end when they were persecuted, it had better commercial and professional grounding, and it addressed itself largely to the same audience. After 1898 and especially since 1900, new social institutions began to emerge such as Chambers of Commerce, professional associations of teachers or journalists, or alumni associations of schools and universities in China as well as of students who had gone abroad. All of them established national and sometimes international networks. Newly established commercial publishers-cum-bookstores used lithography printing for cheap, diverse, and voluminous collections of new knowledge in a wide range of formats. These secured access through

154 For these, see Doleželová-Velingerová and Wagner, *Chinese Encyclopaedias of New Global Knowledge (1870–1930)*.

155 *Xin Erya* 新爾雅 [The new Erya], edited by Wang Rongbao 王榮寶 and Ye Lan 葉瀾 (Shanghai: Guoxue she, 1903).

156 Mary Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province 1865–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

the market rather than politically suspect associations. Such associations and publication venues were crucial for the consolidation of a public sphere in China.

On the media side, commercial newspapers and mass circulation journals started to replace the low circulation and most often subsidized advocacy periodicals of the previous phase since 1899; they were increasingly supplemented by book publications. Most commercial publishers as well as the publishers of advocacy papers and books were concentrated in the Shanghai International Settlement. For decades the publishing house *Shenbaoguan*, which produced the *Shenbao* as well as journals and books, had shown that publications from the Shanghai International Settlement could reach the entire Qing territory.¹⁵⁷ With the media explosion of these years, the Shanghai International Settlement not only maintained, but greatly strengthened its position as the true Chinese media capital. The effectiveness of the shield of extraterritoriality may be gauged from the fact that Liang Qichao was extensively published in Shanghai while he was still on the Peking court's most wanted list after 1898.

The divide between the reformers and the wider "elite activism" is evident from the fact that the media explosion especially after 1900 in Shanghai did not come with a concomitant spread of the *guafen* narrative and its agenda. It did not make it into the mainstream of the commercial papers and journals, but remained concentrated in a substantial, but still marginal section of the media directly associated with the reformers. Examples to be discussed further down include the *Eshi jingwen* 俄事驚聞 (Alerts about the Russian issue), the *Tuhua ribao* 圖畫日報 (Illustrated daily news) and the *Shenzhou ribao* 神州日報 (Divine realm of China daily), as well as some political novels, new stage plays, and poems.

The Western imagery of the partition of China and its Chinese reception

As documented above, the partition of China was widely discussed in the Western press since 1894, and many papers—including regional and local papers—established regular columns with this heading. In the United States, papers with a regional or national standing such as the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe* would publish something like forty, often full-page articles under this heading in 1899 alone. Smaller, local papers,

157 Some periodicals that had been started abroad, such as Liang Qichao's *Zhixin bao* 知新報 [English title: *The Reformer of China*] in Macao and *Qingyi bao* [English title: *The China Critic*] in Yokohama, eventually transferred to Shanghai.

such as the *Butte Weekly Miner* (figure 4) from Montana or *The Owyhee Avalanche* (figure 5) from Ruby City, Idaho, would also have two or three full-page, often illustrated articles which referred to a “Partition of China” in their titles.¹⁵⁸ Readers were familiar with this language from reports about the Ottoman Empire. The range of this discussion can be gauged from a report in the *Boston Globe* in April 1901—that is after the debacle of the Boxer uprising and the foreign intervention in China of 1900. Under the title “Holy Cross Beat Brown” it reported a debating competition between Holy Cross College and Brown University on the theme “Resolved that the partition of China, if it could be satisfactorily agreed upon by the powers, would be conducive to the best interest of the world at large.” Holy Cross won by arguing against.¹⁵⁹ This, as we shall see, is not surprising.

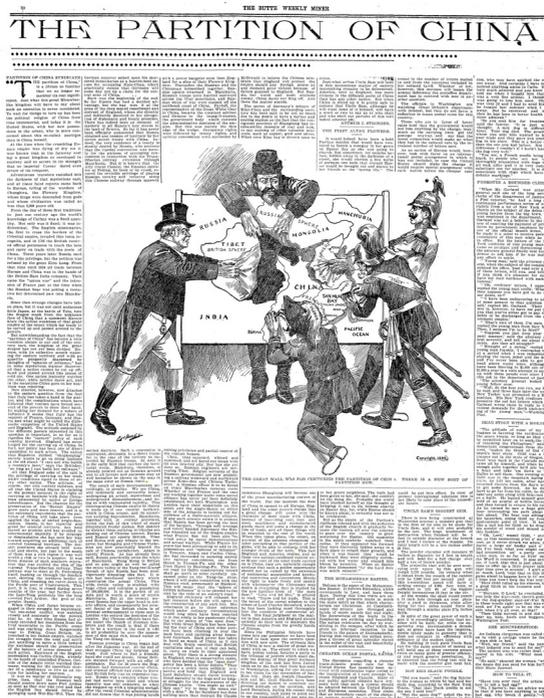


Fig. 4: “The Partition of China,” *The Butte Weekly Miner*, March 30, 1899, 10.

158 Some of these local articles are so knowledgeable that they seem syndicated, although I found no indication in this direction.

159 “Holy Cross Beat Brown,” *Boston Daily Globe*, April 19, 1901, 7.

THE PARTITION OF CHINA

The first of the Chinese empire (which is still called) has been divided into several provinces, and the boundaries of each are now being fixed. The first of these provinces was the province of Peking, which includes Peking, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The second province was the province of Shanxi, which includes Shanxi, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The third province was the province of Shantung, which includes Shantung, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The fourth province was the province of Honan, which includes Honan, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The fifth province was the province of Hubei, which includes Hubei, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The sixth province was the province of Hunan, which includes Hunan, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The seventh province was the province of Szechwan, which includes Szechwan, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The eighth province was the province of Yunnan, which includes Yunnan, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The ninth province was the province of Guizhou, which includes Guizhou, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The tenth province was the province of Gansu, which includes Gansu, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The eleventh province was the province of Shaanxi, which includes Shaanxi, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The twelfth province was the province of Sichuan, which includes Sichuan, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The thirteenth province was the province of Chongqing, which includes Chongqing, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The fourteenth province was the province of Hainan, which includes Hainan, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The fifteenth province was the province of Tibet, which includes Tibet, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The sixteenth province was the province of Xinjiang, which includes Xinjiang, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The seventeenth province was the province of Inner Mongolia, which includes Inner Mongolia, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The eighteenth province was the province of Qinghai, which includes Qinghai, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The nineteenth province was the province of Ningxia, which includes Ningxia, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces. The twentieth province was the province of Shaanxi, which includes Shaanxi, and the surrounding territory, and is now being divided into several provinces.

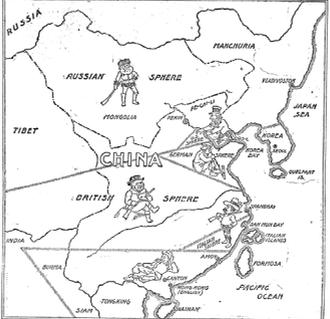


Fig. 5: "The Partition of China," The Owyhee Avalanche (Ruby City, ID), June 23, 1899, 6.

The concept of a "Partition of China" had found its own visual representation in the foreign press long before this happened in the Chinese media. This visual representation operated through maps and cartoons, which used visual metaphors to illustrate the abstract notion of "partition." One of the earliest and certainly most influential of these illustrations of a partition with their double content of information and evaluation is Jean Michel Moreau le Jeune's often copied 1773 allegory of the partition of Poland shown earlier (figure 1). It showed a map on which Poland's neighbours marked their claims, but already took the next

step by using the metaphor of a cake for the country in the caption. From here it was only a small step to depicting a country as a delicacy ready to be shared. We see an international visual language emerging. In the same way in which concepts moved from one environment to another by being translated into local expressions, illustrations of metaphorical images are translated into local counterparts. "Partition" took on a Chinese guise as *guafen*, and we shall see how a country depicted as a "delicacy for kings" will be "translated" into local delicacies. In this sense, the Chinese "watermelon" is a "translation" of Le Jeune's already bilingual and by implication bi-visual "Troelfth Cake/Gâteau des Rois." The exchanges in the visual representations of concepts are as asymmetrical as those of words and concepts. Reflecting China's standing in the global public sphere around 1900, neither the expression "watermelon-cutting" nor the image of a melon for a country entered the international verbal or visual vernacular.

Visual representations of the partition narrative show a wide variety. They range from a map marking the different powers' "spheres of influence" on a map of China (figure 6) to symbolic representations of the different

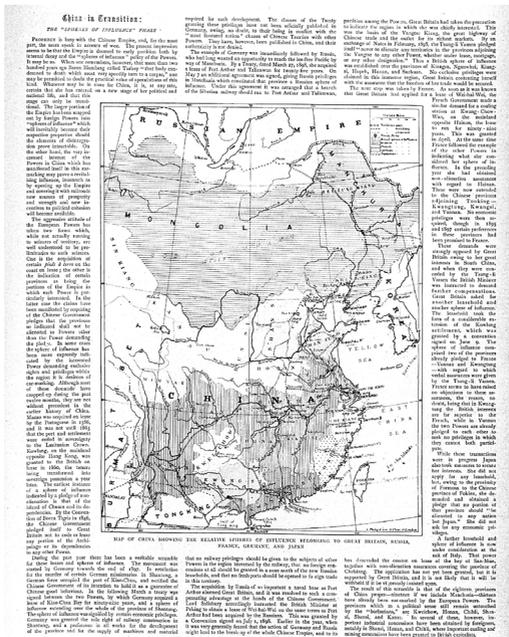


Fig. 6: "China in Transition. The Sphere of Influence," The Graphic, April 15, 1899, 473.



Fig. 8: James Gillray, *The Plumb-pudding in danger; or State Epicures taking un Petit Souper*, 1802.

to find a good “translation” into a local counterpart to make sure the metaphor was understood. The *Marumaru Chinbun*, a Japanese satirical journal that emulated the *Punch* and was associated with the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, came up very early, in 1884, with the image of a foreigner talking in his sleep (figure 9).

This image shows a family dinner where guests, each marked as a nation with an initial, share a pig; Japan is conspicuously absent. The guests around the table behave in a very civilized manner—meaning that they have a good time and do not go at each other with their knives. There is no explicit reference to China but the depiction of China through the image of a pig is often documented in later Japanese and Chinese cartoons.¹⁶⁰ These depictions refuse to accept China’s emerging official

160 An example is a bilingual Japanese postcard printed September 13, 1914 by the Ukiyo-e artist Tanaka Shōzō 田中良三 (1874–1946) entitled *The Illustration of the Great European War no. 16: Ahumoros (sic) Atlas of The World, Kokkei jikyaku sekai chizu* 歐洲大戰亂畫報 (其十六):滑稽時局世界地圖). All the states are depicted as animals here with China as a pig dressed in traditional Chinese costume. Unaware of the big turmoil behind its back and the looming Russian bear to the north, it obsessively stares east at its own coastline and Japan through a magnifying glass inscribed “barometer.” Both sides of the postcard can be found at <https://www>.



Fig. 9: “Ketōjin no negoto” 毛唐人の寐言 [A Foreigner Talks in his Sleep].” Marumaru Chinbun, 1884.

self-identification as a dragon, for example on flags identifying the nation where a ship is registered. Besides “translating” a word, metaphor, or image into a form recognizable by addressees in a different linguistic and cultural environment, the selection of a particular counterpart might also be dictated by the viewpoint of the person making the selection or that

nisan.tw/postcard_sp20.htm [Accessed on 14. September 2017], and a high quality image at https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/3e/World_around_1900.jpg/1280px-World_around_1900.jpg [Accessed on 14. September 2017]. By this time, the image of China as a pig was already in use among Chinese cartoonists. In 1909, the *Minhu ribao* 民呼日報 (English title: *People's Wail*) in Shanghai published a cartoon where the foreign powers share a pig inscribed “Territory of China,” (*Zhongguo lingtu* 中國領土). The parts they have taken or leased are already on their plates and a Chinese official is serving the drinks inscribed “mines” and “railways.” “Wairen luange zhi xianxiang” 外人鬻割之現象 (The phenomenon of the foreigners carving up [China]), *Minhu ribao* 1909, reprinted in *Qingdai baokan tuhua jicheng* 清代報刊圖畫集成, vol. 6, 26 (Beijing: Xinhua she, 2001).

of other figures in the image. To avoid misunderstanding, the link might be made explicitly through an inscription on the image, in the caption, by explaining the counterpart of a metaphor, or by inserting the foreign source for a word into the bracket.

This dinner scenario reoccurs in many European and American depictions of the late 1890s. A highly critical 1897 British cartoon-plus-poem depicts the scramble for Chinese territory by Westerners as cannibalism that is ironically justified in the poem as spreading civilization and Christianity. Russia and Germany are already at it, the French cock is getting ready, and the British lion and the colt-bearing American are rushing in from their ships in the background probably to prevent further dismemberment (figure 10).¹⁶¹

THE PARTITION OF CHINA

THE Heathen Chinees! The Heathen Chinees!
 What a channel for Christian Expansion is he.
 Then Ho! for the Flowery Land of the East,
 Like vultures we'll swoop on the promising feast.
 Commission your Navies, ye Nations so free,
 To bear the true light to the Heathen Chinees.

If Russia "makes converts," it's perfectly clear
 We need for "converting" a well-defined sphere;
 If Germany's "missions" hold meetings for prayer,
 So Christian a work 'tis our duty to share.
 Incidentally, too, there is cash to be made;
 There's naught like Religion to stimulate Trade.

Then come all ye Teachers and Preachers and Fighters,
 Backed up by the Press and its wonderful writers,
 Let's give to this darkened and downtrodden nation
 A touch of the blessings of Civilisation.
 And our Christian "Maxims" will work, you will see,
 A change for the good in that Heathen Chinees.

29th December 1897.



"The Heathen Chinees! The Heathen Chinees!"

Fig. 10: The Partition of China. *British satirical poem by Sir Wilfrid Lawson, December 29, 1897. Cartoon by F. Carruthers Gould. From W. Lawson, F. Carruthers-Gould, Cartoons in Rhyme and Line (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), 91-92.*

Another example showing partition as a culinary feast is from the *Puck*, a very popular New York satirical journal founded by two Germans. An 1898 cartoon shows the Powers partitioning the Ottoman Empire, which is depicted through the pun Turkey/turkey (figure 11). This cartoon

161 The inscription under the image is an allusion to Bret Harte's 1871 very popular poem by this title. For this background, see Gary Scharnhorst, "'Ways That Are Dark': Appropriations of Bret Harte's 'Plain Language from Truthful James,'" *Nineteenth Century Literature* 51.3 (1996): 377-399.

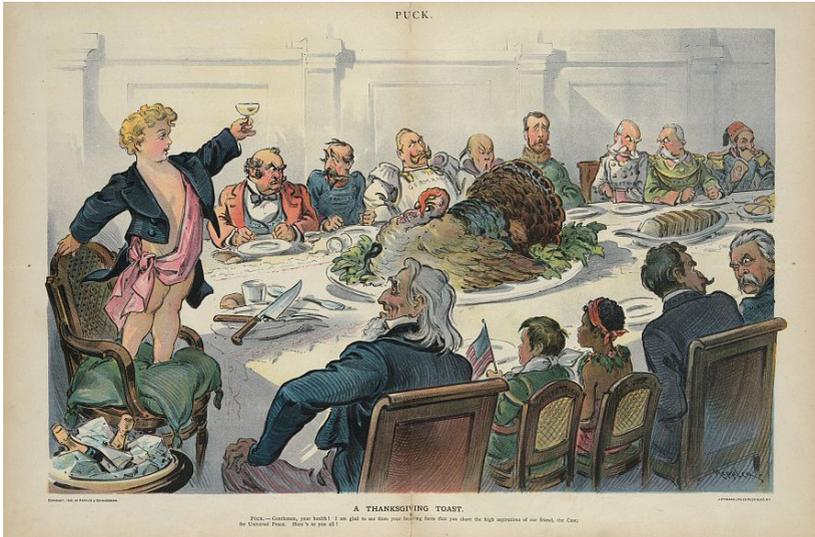


Fig. 11: “A Thanksgiving Toast” Puck: Gentlemen, your health! I am glad to see from your beaming faces that you share the high aspirations of our friend, the Czar, for Universal Peace. Here’s to you all!” by Udo Keppler, Puck, November 30, 1898. Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

is of particular interest for the Chinese case. The Powers are sat around the table and instead of having dinner, they are busy struggling with each other. The Russian Emperor makes a pious face as he claimed at the time that was defending the Christians in the Ottoman Empire. The representative of Turkey, who is sitting in the far right corner above, smirks with delight because their mutual contradictions prevent the Powers from actually dividing the turkey/Turkey that lies unharmed in the middle. There is an implication that the Ottoman Empire shared the Qing court’s assumption that the conflict among the Powers was its best protection.

Another image from the same year shows the Powers partitioning China that here has the form of a cake. Uncle Sam (United States) who already has the largest sword of them all does not join the feast. However, he is clearly envious as he sits at a side table with a small pie in front of him, namely Cuba which he just took from Spain, and a bottle of wine inscribed “Philippines,” where it was just intervening against Spain and would set up a protectorate. John Bull (Britain) is telling the other Powers not to begrudge the US this little Cuba and the few Philippine islands as they were just about to gorge themselves on the huge China cake (figure 12).

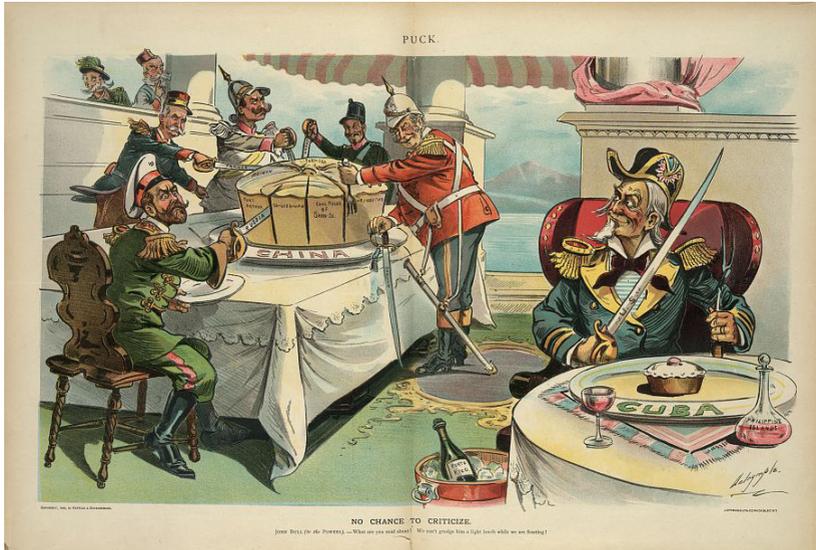


Fig. 12: “No Chance to Criticize.” John Bull to the Powers: “What are you mad at? We can’t grudge him a light lunch while we are feasting,” by Louis Dalrymple, Puck, May 25, 1898. Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

With the same scenario, but the food adjusted to Austrian tastes, a local cartoon journal offered the scenario with a Sacher cake in 1899 (figure 13). China is represented by a huge cake in the shape of a fat official with a queue who is solidly asleep as he is being cut apart. Like in the previous cartoon, China is the passive object of this feast, not a guest at the table. The cake is cut by Britain as the strongest power, but civilized behaviour among the guests again prevails in another allegory of international law as civilized gluttony. A 1901 French postcard presents the same family scenario with the photographs of the different heads of state inserted with the territories of their desire already marked (figure 14).

The image of a dinner party, which might include some stares and threatening gestures, but essentially remains very civilized has a broader meaning. On a very pragmatic level, it illustrates the Powers’ effort to avoid a major war among each other. This is done by creating a consensual legal framework in the context of international law through conferences such as the Berlin conferences in 1878 and 1883 that will allow for the establishment of colonies or zones of influence while putting restraints on the Powers engaged in this exercise.



Fig. 13: "An der chinesischen Table d'hôte" [At the Chinese dinner table], by F. G., *Humoristische Blätter*, Vienna, March 12, 1899. Inscription: Brother Jonathan (= US): "Stop it! I also want to join the feast; do you think the Philippines will satisfy me?" Austria (speaking to herself): "What a fine appetite this fellow has! Again I cannot join because the local Chinese sit heavily in my stomach."



Fig. 14: *Le Gâteau Chinois* [The Chinese pastry], French postcard, probably 1901. Source: Institute of Chinese Studies, Rupert-Karls-Universität Heidelberg.

All these images, whether map, pig, or cake, have one element in common, namely the complete absence of agency on the side of China. China is the passive object of desire but not a part of the wheeling and dealing around the table. The Chinese government's absence of agency in determining the fate of China, which critics of the Qing court had already addressed verbally, follows the iconographic tradition of the depiction of the Polish king in Moreau le Jeune's 1773 painting. It is explicitly thematised in a French cartoon from 1899 which shows a helpless Qing official throwing up his arms in despair while the Powers assembled around their China pie do not even notice him. The prominent role of the German Kaiser indicates that the main target of this cartoon was Germany's occupation of Shandong. He is stared down by the British Queen who has her hands on another part of China, while Russia and France seem very close and share the same interest, and Japan sits frustrated at the side (figure 15). It is noticeable that these images very much coincide with the way critics such as Liang Qichao perceived the Qing court and China's situation. Neither the creators of these cartoons nor the court's Chinese critics considered the option that the Qing court might have—perhaps unwittingly—been right in trusting that the balance of interests among the Powers would secure China's sovereignty.

The understanding of “partition” in these cartoons is clearly drawing on the Polish example with the implication that the powers will all appropriate and consume their share of the Chinese body/cake/pie/pudding. At this moment in time, the differences between the Powers were not as evident as they would be after the Boxer upheaval and the foreign intervention in 1900; the partition still focuses predominantly on foreign enclaves along China’s coastline and inland borders, although the pie represents all of China.

The imagery used in these cartoons already shows a flawed grasp of reality. Taking the last cartoon (figure 15) as an example, the German Kaiser is shown defying the wishes of Queen Victoria when insisting on appropriating parts of the Shandong Peninsula. The Russian Emperor next to him is contemplating taking territories in the north, his knife ready but not yet applied. The French Marianne is sidling up to him, indicating the pursuit of similar interests. The Japanese, who just won the war with China, is angry that he is not among the beneficiaries. He does not yet wield his big sword, but it lies unsheathed within reach and he might take it up at any time. This rich narrative also brings out the weakness in the extreme definiteness of such depictions. In historical reality, for example, the Germans were forced to accommodate the British stance by only “leasing” the territory, which meant leaving China’s territory legally intact, and by directly opening the port of Tsingtao to all—thus foregoing exclusive rights for themselves. The intentions of the Germans, Russians, French, and Japanese might have been full appropriation, but these intentions ran into British and American opposition and could only be realized in the form of zones of influence. We see in these images the same dependency on earlier uses shown by concepts that are articulated through words. Appropriating parts of a territory was depicted through taking a slice of a cake for one’s own consumption, but once there is no appropriation, but only a time-limited lease, the familiar image offers a misinterpretation. The emotional response of an unsuspecting viewer, however, might still be the one that might be justified for a truthful representation.

The cartoons imply a concrete, timely, and intense narrative about the state of affairs at the time, detailing perceptions of the attitudes of the Powers involved, the rules and interests governing their behaviour, the particulars of their relationships, and the position of China in the process. In terms of conceptual history, they are thus fully articulate—though not verbalized or only minimally verbalized—parts of the discussion on the concept of partition. They may be translated from pictorial to

verbalized language once the context and allusions that were familiar to contemporary readers have been understood. With their compressed visual form, they joined in the general political communication of the



Fig. 15: "En Chine. Le gateau des Rois et... des Empereurs," by H. Meyer, Le Petit Journal, supplement, January 16, 1898.

time, offering the same bandwidth of interpretation as verbal communication or political action while allowing the spectator to use his own words and feelings to translate the complex situation shown in the image.

The basic constellation inherent to visual and metaphorical conceptualizations of powers surrounding a country they would like to “eat,” exploit, or appropriate has a longer history than the Polish partition and came with a great variety of images. As an analytical tool, the metaphor of a cake, turkey, pig, or pie had strength because it showcased the desirability of the object to be consumed and allowed for the depiction of the social interaction between the Powers. One of its analytical weaknesses lay in showing a country as inert food which implied that it was a thing that, once taken and consumed, could not regenerate itself. The regenerative option had been expressed through still earlier forms of visual metaphorical or allegorical representations such as the national economy of a country as a live cow that is being milked by foreign powers. Examples can be found already in the late sixteenth century for the Low Countries and for England in the 1780s during the American War of Independence, with the Dutch, Spanish, French as well as the Americans (as Indians) busily appropriating parts of the British economy.¹⁶²

Without the Chinese side playing any proactive role, a very controversial discussion about the dilemma presented by China’s partition continued in the West in 1899. This was especially the case among the British. The London government had been moving away from its policy of maintaining the territorial integrity of China. In Great Britain itself, however, but especially among the British community in the Chinese Treaty Ports, many were insisting on securing the territorial integrity of China and stabilizing its government as the best way to maintain a secure and stable environment for their trade. Eventually, the British Chambers of Commerce in the Chinese Treaty Ports asked one prominent critic of the government policy, Lord Charles Beresford, an admiral and well-known public figure, to investigate on-site the situation of China and the attitude of the Anglo-Saxon foreign community. His report came out in 1899. Entitled *The Break-up of China* rather than “The Partition of China,” it saw the problem in China’s collapsing due to its own inept governance and the Powers feeling forced to take on the administrations of segments of the country to maintain international stability and balance of power (figure 16).

162 For details, see Wagner, “China ‘Asleep’ and ‘Awakening,’” note 38 and note 66.



Fig. 16: Lord Beresford, The Break-up of China, cover, 1899.

The Anglo-American community in China, Lord Beresford concluded, was unanimous in rejecting a shift in policy and demanded the continuation of Britain's earlier plan to preserve China's territorial integrity, which actually had continued to be the official line. In order to secure a stable and predictable business environment in the face of a tottering dynasty, however, his interviewees suggested the extension of the duties of the Chinese Maritime Customs office under Robert Hart, a British subject who was a Qing official, to all commercial tax collection within the country, the establishment of a police force under British officers who would become fully committed officials of the Qing court, as well as other measures to stabilize the economic and social situation.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ A similar position was taken by Gilbert Reid, who had established the International Institute of China in 1897 to defend Chinese interests. See his "The Powers and the Partition of China," *North American Review* 522 (May 1900): 634–641. Viscount Wolseley had already in 1895 recommended that China should hire experienced British officers to lead its army.

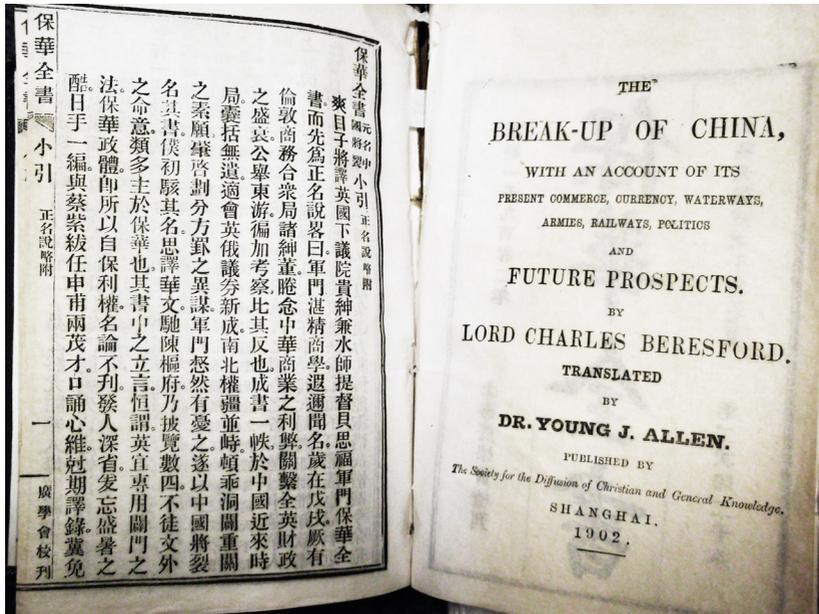


Fig. 17: Bao Huaquan shu [*Preserving China's territorial integrity*], Chinese translation of Lord Charles Beresford, *The Break-up of China* (Shanghai: Guangxue hui, 1902).

Lord Beresdorf's report was quickly translated into Chinese by Young Allen. It was published in 1902 with a title that accurately described its main thrust even though it is the opposite of the original: *On Preserving China's Territorial Integrity* (*Bao Huaquan shu* 保華全書) (figure 17).¹⁶⁴

A widely circulated June 1899 cartoon by Tse Tsan Tai 謝纘泰 (1872–1937), an Australian of Chinese origin living in Hong Kong who wrote in English and had been involved in the failed 1895 uprising in Canton, began linking the Western imagery of China's partition with the *guafen* metaphor. Under the bilingual title *Shiju quantu* 時局全圖/*The Situation in the Far East*, his cartoon showed a sophisticated

164 Lord Charles Beresford, *The Break-up of China* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1899). Chinese translation: *Bao Huaquan shu* 保華全書, translated by Young Allen (Shanghai: Guangxue hui, 1902). The Chinese title presents a quandary, for which the translator did not offer a solution. It normally would be truncated *Bao Hua quanshu* [Complete book about protecting China], but given the focus on China's territorial integrity and the prevalence of the binomial *baquan* 保全 for "preserving territorial integrity," the truncation proposed here seems more plausible. I am grateful to the University of Otago, New Zealand, for allowing me to copy this rare Chinese work from their collection.

and generally accurate understanding of the differences and agreements between the Powers in matters of partitioning China as well as of the allegorical imagery used in Western papers (figure 18). Inscriptions on the animals facilitated the decoding of the image. These showed Russia (with a size corresponding to the perceived threat) and France reaching for actual colonial control of their areas, Great Britain as the most powerful nation supporting the “territorial integrity of China,” Germany snatching a small piece with Great Britain directly counteracting this, and Japan deciding to side with Great Britain under these circumstances because its own aspirations in Liaoning had been thwarted by Russia. All of these animals are already on Chinese soil, indicating that they already have some sphere of influence in the country. After establishing a protectorate in the Philippines, the United States are shown as a power with a stake in East Asia. The American eagle has its eyes on China, but its political strategy is summarized by the inscription on it, “blood is thicker than water,” meaning that it will side with its blood relative Great Britain. The figures who should be most concerned with the attitudes and actions of these beasts are Chinese officials, but they are either asleep, go after girls (both in center) or after money (bottom left), if they are not training the military with antiquated methods such as stone-lifting (top left corner) instead of the handling of modern weapons. They all are oblivious to what is going on in their own country.

This bilingual cartoon used the shorthand of an illustration with some text to explain a hugely complex situation. It follows Liang’s line of argument that the main issue is the absence of any willingness among Chinese officialdom to perceive and tackle the crisis while every Western power had already developed an attitude and a strategy.¹⁶⁵

Aware of introducing a new medium to Chinese audiences capable of reading Chinese and English, it adds a short characterization of this visual medium on the margins of the image: “Being a (visual) metaphor without verbalization, (a cartoon) makes things clear at one glance.” Tse Tsan Tai took this medium from Western papers and the wide distribution as well as frequent imitation of this particular image seems to have established the cartoon as a new Chinese form of mass communication. This cartoon still repeats, however, the foreign imagery of zones of influence and possible further developments. Even though the accompanying poem on the reverse side uses the *guafen* metaphor in an explicit form, the cartoon itself does not yet manage to visualize the *guafen* as this

165 For a detailed analysis of this poster and its spread, see Wagner, “China ‘Asleep,’” 11–32.



Fig. 18: Shiju tu, 1899 or 1900, probably Japan..

was not part of a familiar international visual vocabulary. This poem ends with a call to “wake up now and not wait until the land is carved up like a melon” (*yi jin xing, mo dai tu fenlie si gua* 宜今醒, 莫待土分裂似瓜). The formula is important because it is the first to revive the metaphorical meaning of *guafen* by speaking of carving up the land “like” a melon.

Shortly after this print had come out, on September 6, 1899, the American Secretary of State John Hay intervened—without any activity or request from the Chinese side—to end the new partition quarrel. By focusing strictly on equal commercial access for all nations to all parts of China

under a unified Chinese customs regulation and by banking on the basic unwillingness of any of the foreign powers to take on the burden of a colonial administration of large swaths of Chinese territory, he managed to get the explicit consent of all the Powers to respect the “Open Door” rule. Signing on implied the Powers’ commitment to the territorial integrity of China, although Russia made several provisos. The agreement meant that no foreign power would have an exclusive zone in China beyond railway development and mining leases agreed to by the Chinese government, although the United States had never even accepted the notion of the “sphere of influence,” which the British had agreed to in treaties with Russia and Germany earlier in 1899.¹⁶⁶ A cartoon in the US periodical *Puck* illustrates this intervention by the United States (figure 19).

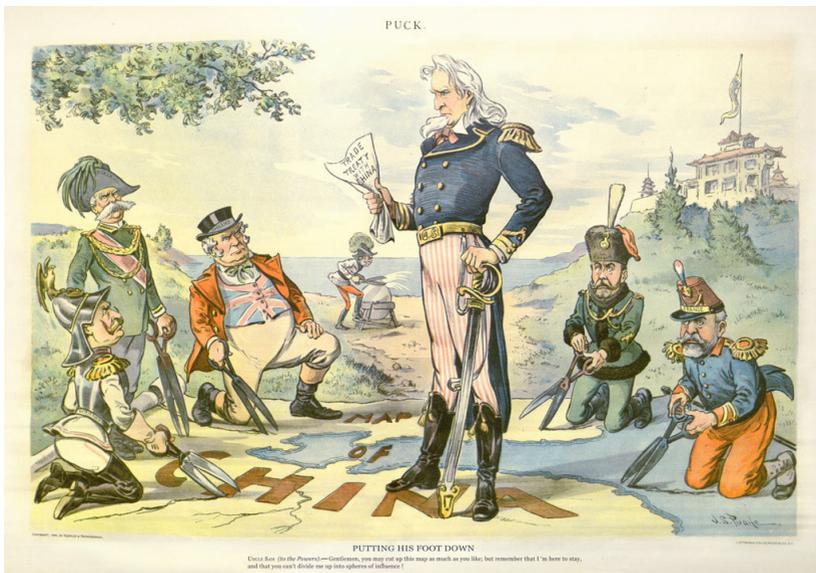


Fig. 19: “Putting his foot down,” by J. S. Pughe, *Puck*, August 22, 1899, 3.

After the allied intervention against the Boxers in 1900 and the court’s ensuing flight from Peking, the question of the viability of the Chinese polity came to the forefront again. Would China “break-up” or “die?”

166 See Bruce A. Elleman, *International Competition in China 1899–1991: The Rise, Fall, and Restoration of the Open Door Policy* (Abington: Routledge, 2015), ch. 1. The US successfully maintained this stance also after the allied intervention against the Boxers in 1900.

The passive agency exerted even by the gigantic size of a Chinese state that is not only “asleep,” but positively dead, is vividly captured in a 1900 cartoon from the same journal (figure 20).



Fig. 20: “The real trouble will come with the ‘Wake,’” *Puck*, August 15, 1900. Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

Published as the defeat of the Boxers by the Allies was just days away, the cartoon anticipates the gigantic Chinese dragon dead. The Powers are all present in China with military forces and seem prepared to each bite or cut off a part of the corpse. Their military strength, however, is inferior to that of the British lion, the only one with a gun, which has taken on the role of preventing even a partition of this corpse while the American eagle watches from a distance.

Other cartoons from this time used similar imagery but give it a different reading (figure 21).¹⁶⁷ The Powers are all busy cutting off parts of the Chinese monster. The main conflict is again between Russia, which has thrown itself across most of the body, and Britain that just wants a tail end, but has the biggest sword. True to reality, no one has yet actually cut off a piece

¹⁶⁷ A reproduction of this postcard is put on display in the residence of Li Hongzhang in Hefei. <http://instagr.com/tag/theformerresideceoflihongzhang>, [Accessed on 15. August 2017].

from this corpse, but the threat of a military confrontation between Russia and Britain over China is palpable. In fact, the postcard got it wrong, no partition occurred.



Fig. 21: “Dissection du monstre chinois. Le cosaque à John Bull: Regarde mais n’y touche pas” [Dissection of the Chinese monster. “The Cossack to John Bull: You may look on, but don’t touch it]. French Postcard, posted in 1902.

As the Qing court ceded to external and internal pressures by starting a “reform of governance” (*xin zheng* 新政) in both its foreign relations and internal politics in 1901, the situation of the country quickly stabilized. The Western papers quickly abandoned their talk about an unavoidable partition of China as well as the use of metaphors and images of a sleeping or dead China. The writers and cartoonists had used the concept of “partition” and the images of the territorial delicacies to be shared or fought over as tools to explain the concrete conditions of the moment,

but switched to others once the situation had changed.¹⁶⁸ With the beginning of the Qing court's "reform of governance," (*xinzheng* 新政) in 1901, the main focus quickly became the threat of an "awakening" China with its huge, laborious, and cheap labor force that might translate into military might (figure 22).¹⁶⁹

About to divide the fruits on the table—the Boxer indemnity payments—among each other rather than partition China, the Powers are suddenly concerned not about the balance of power but about the Damocles Sword of a suddenly "awakening" gigantic China. By 1906, a widely reproduced French cartoon went all the way showing how "The Chinese Giant Rouses Himself and Shakes the Other Nations off the Counterpane of the World."



Fig. 22: "A Disturbing Possibility in the East," Puck, September 1, 1901. Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

168 Japanese publications continued to discuss the partition of China (using the Japanese term for "partition," *bunkatsu* 分割) early in the Republican period to refer to the division of the country among different warlords. See Sakamaki Teiichirō 酒巻貞一郎, *Shina bunkatsu ron* 支那分割論 [On the partition of China], Tōkyō: Keiseisha, 1913, and the section *Shina bunkatsu ron* 支那分割論 in Matsumoto Hikojirō 松本彦次郎 and Hirose Tesshi 広瀬哲士 *Seiyoshi ron: Saishin kenkyū* 西洋史論: 最新研究 [East Asian history: Newest Study], Tōkyō: Keiseisha, 1913. Both volumes are accessible through the National Diet Library website.

169 Reproduced in Wagner, "China 'Asleep,'" Fig. 30.

The instrumental understanding of the verbal and visual metaphors was facilitated by the clear difference between the abstract concepts such as “partition” and their concrete application such as a cake being shared by different people. Although “partition” had been most widely used for actual separation such as in the case of Poland, it was an abstract concept that was capable of accommodating different degrees of separation. There also was no agenda in the West to keep the partition focus alive because partition had always been controversial, and even seen as a potential burden rather than a boon, especially in the Anglo-American press.

***Guafen* etymology: Maintaining the metaphor, adjusting the reading**

The anchor for the changed Western perception of China was the Peking court’s capacity to govern effectively. This was increasingly the case after 1901. For the reformers with their new instruments of mass communication, however, the storyline of the court selling out and the people being asleep was too good to give up because it sustained their own moral standing and their political authority. As we have seen, a range of applications could be used to illustrate the abstract Western concept of “partition.” These included a partition of the country into spheres of influence with some segments even under foreign taxation and governance. “Cutting up a melon,” however, intrinsically does not have this flexibility, as it would be awkward to explain a metaphor in terms that do not fit the image. As a result the use of the term *guafen* continued in the Chinese advocacy press during the first decade of the twentieth century, but ended up being awkwardly manipulated to account for actual developments familiar to the readers. Among these developments were primarily efforts of the Qing court—as well as later Republican-period authorities—to develop China’s infrastructure and mining with the help of foreign investors—often with a solid cut reserved for the officials or warlords in charge of handing out the privilege.

With the move to reach wider audiences came the search for new media to carry the *guafen* narrative and its agenda. These included the political cartoon, the theater stage, and the novel, but most importantly the discovery of *guafen* as a lively metaphorical expression that would relate the danger for the country in terms of an everyday experience. We have already seen the first move in this direction in the text accompanying Tse Tsan Tai’s poster “The Situation in the Far East” that explicitly marked *guafen* as a metaphorical expression even though the poster image did not make use of the watermelon image.

With the Russian advance into the Chinese Northeast in the early 1900s, the *guafen* theme moved again centre stage in the political agitation against Russia and the Chinese government's inactivity. The expression made it into the titles of popular political novels such as *Guafen canhuo yuyan ji* 瓜分慘禍預言記 (*A prophecy on the sad fate of being carved up*) (1903),¹⁷⁰ and was used in historical fiction such as *Bolan shuaiwang ji* 波蘭衰亡記 (Record of the demise of Poland) (1903), which in turn was the basis for a 1904 Peking opera by the actor Wang Xiaonong 王笑儂 that came with the untranslatable title *Gua zhong lan yin* 瓜種蘭因 (literally: melon race orchid/Poland cause). In this opera, Turkey has replaced Russia as the foreign power, but the cause for Poland's demise is internal division to the point that a Pole feels free to sell his knowledge about a weak spot in the Polish defense to Turkey. In a rediscovery and revival of the metaphorical value of *guafen*, the Polish Prime Minister on stage has a real watermelon brought as a refreshment when he is sitting down to read the peace proposal approved by the Polish king. The proposal agreed to pay reparations, to have Turkish troops stationed in the capital, and to leave one province under Turkish control as a guarantee. A look at the melon slices on the table gives him the fresh insight: "Just open your eyes and it is evident that this means cutting up our little Poland (like a) watermelon. [. . .] The demise of my country is before my eyes."¹⁷¹ Placing the melon slices on the table here amounts to offering the "etymology" of the *guafen* metaphor. It resuscitated the melon from the proverbial graveyard of dead metaphors and brought out its evocative powers in the process.

This resuscitation of the *guafen* metaphor was not restricted to a hugely popular new opera, but was soon taken up by the new visual media, most importantly the newly emerging and highly productive genre of the Chinese political cartoon. A few examples will have to suffice (figures 23–26).¹⁷²

170 This claimed to be a translation by a man referring to himself as Yuanxuan Zhengyi 軒轅正裔 of a work by a widely travelled Chinese who was able to foretell the future. The work, the text claimed, survived only in a Japanese translation, from which this had been retranslated. Quite a few Chinese political novels used the claim of being translations to enhance their standing. For an analysis of this novel, see Yeh, *Political Novel*, 156.

171 “睜眼來看，分明是，瓜分小波瀾 [. . .] 亡國禍，就在眼前，” Wang Xiaonong 王笑儂, *Gua zhong lan yin* 瓜種蘭因, act 12, *Anhui suhua bao* 13 (1904), 30. See also Karl, *Staging the World*, 215. A somewhat expanded and recast version of the analysis of this opera with a translation of the surviving part in *Staging the World* will be found in Rebecca Karl, “Staging the world in late-Qing China: Globe, nation, and race in a 1904 Beijing opera,” *Identities* 6.4 (2010): 551–606.

172 On Ma Xingchi's background, see Wagner, “China ‘Asleep’,” 102.



Fig. 23: "Selling Melon." From Tuhua ribao 圖畫日報 1, 1909, 8.

The salesman, who wears something like an official's uniform, offers small pieces of melon for tasting, a reference to the small territories leased to foreign powers by the Qing court. They are depicted here as an enticement for the customers buy full slices. As evident from the accompanying text, the primary initiative in this scene is on the side of the salesman, who is metaphorically "selling out" the fatherland.

After all other Powers received rights to develop railway lines, Japan forcefully demands the right to develop the An Feng railway line against the others' protests. The metaphor of cutting off a big piece of the melon has lost its explanatory function because the only graphic link between the railway line and the image is that of the knife's cut. The *Popular Rights Illustrated* ran an entire series of cartoons with the watermelon as China in 1912, entitled "Guaxi," 瓜戲 (Melon theater).¹⁷³

173 See *Minquan huabao* 民權畫報, reprint *Qingdai baokan jicheng* 清代報刊集成, vol. 12 (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 2001), 635, 660, 668, 684, 693, 700, 708, 716, 725, 732.



Fig. 24: “Anfeng luxian zhi weixiang” 安丰路線之危象 [Image of the danger of the An Feng line], (by Ma Xingchi 馬星馳). [Japanese speaking:] “I want to get my own hands moving.” Shenzhou huabao 神州畫報, 1907.

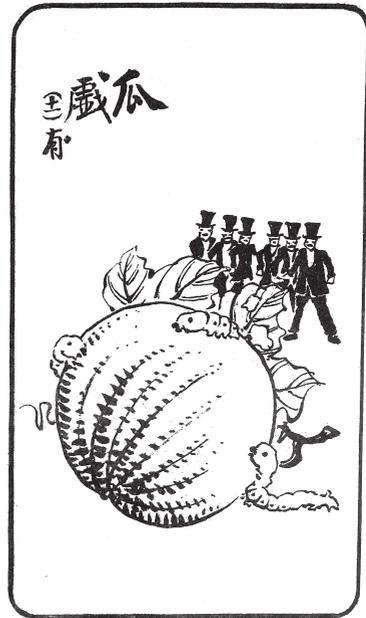


Fig. 25: “Guaxi 11” 瓜戲 [Melon Theater 11], Minquan huabao 民權畫報 [Popular Rights Illustrated], 1912.

Foreign investors look on smiling as caterpillars—representing railway lines—nibble away at the Chinese melon.¹⁷⁴

In another cartoon (figure 26), foreigners with top hats and Chinese with soft hats are joining forces to cut up the Chinese melon.¹⁷⁵ In the early months of the young Republic, the central government had little control over the country. Military men, who had recruited armies and had contributed to the demise of the Qing Dynasty, refused to submit to the new central

174 In another cartoon from the same series, vines ensnaring the melon are used to symbolize the railway lines, see Wagner, “China ‘Asleep,’” figure 25.

175 According to the new ritual rules promulgated in the first year of the Republic of China, men had to cut off their queue and wear hats, but from photographs of the time it is clear that the citizens took to soft rather than top hats, the latter being associated with upper-class Englishmen and diplomatic occasions.

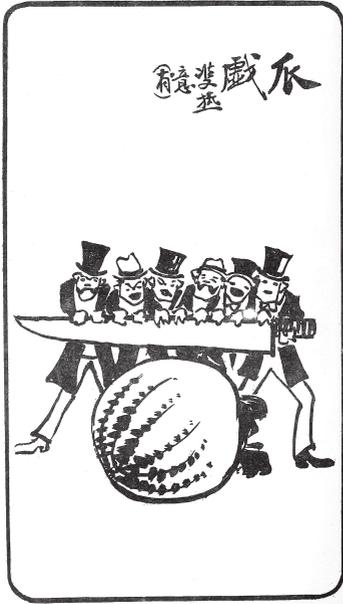


Fig. 26: “Guaxi” 瓜戲 [Melon Theater].
Minquan huabao 民權畫報 [Popular Rights
Illustrated], 1912.



Fig. 27: “Guaxi 2” 瓜戲 [Melon plays]
(2). Minquan huabao, 1912.

authority and began engaging in their own foreign relations to exchange the funds needed for their troops for privileges in railway and mining.

In this cartoon Li Yuanhong 黎元洪, the vice president, and Yuan Shikai 袁世凱, who was assuming the presidency, play ball with the Chinese melon in 1912. The image was taken from kick-ball, and since no watermelon fits that purpose, it must be considered a visual mixed metaphor.

In another hapless variant of the *guafen* theme, the outlying territories such as Manchuria and Mongolia are displayed as separate melons that are already taken over by foreign powers (figure 28). China’s thirteen provinces are treated as one melon, but the military men controlling the segments are fighting each other for slices. The *National Review*, where this was published, was an early Chinese propaganda organ in English with a foreign editor that had been set up by and supported Yuan Shikai.

These examples show how in different Chinese narratives a common *guafen* iconography emerges, which was shared by the political essay,

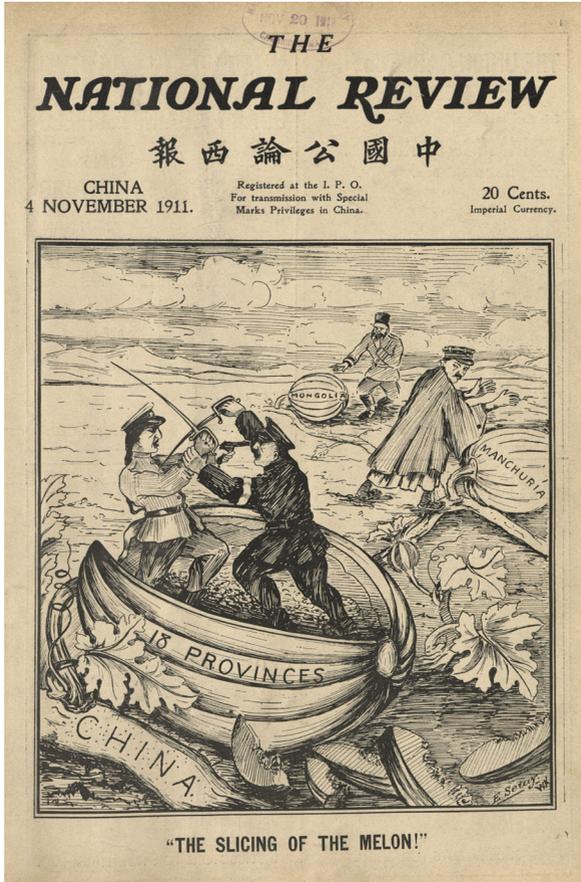


Fig. 28: "The Slicing of the Melon," National Review, Shanghai, November 4, 1911.

poetry, drama, and the cartoon (and, as shall be demonstrated below, by paintings). *Guafen* began as a dead metaphor that was used as a translation for a foreign term, underwent an etymological exploration that revived the image of the melon, and eventually became a highly articulate Chinese concept epitomizing a threat to the nation. All this widely shared use notwithstanding, the *guafen* storyline did not get enough traction in the public sphere during these early years to become a significant tool of discursive power. Its reality fit was too weak to attract wide support in the public sphere so that it remained—for the time being—a metaphorical concept with a particular application that was used only by a small, if vocal and growing segment associated with the reformers.

In the meantime, the Chinese state authorities of the Republican period continued to grant concessions to foreign investors (the authorities being often warlords who would use the money for arms purchases). The most revolutionary of them all, Sun Yat-sen, however, wrote an entire book about the merits of an approach to actively involve foreigners, their capital, and their technology in the development of China's infrastructure. His *The International Development of China* (1922), a book written in English for foreign eyes, was explicit, first, in acknowledging the Chinese need for Western capital and know-how; second, in recognizing as legitimate the interest of foreign investors to make money; third, in reserving the right of the Chinese government to set priorities for this development; and fourth, in advocating to involve the different Western powers in this project to prevent dependency on any single power.¹⁷⁶ The book assumed, in short, that by making sure—as China had done since the first treaties with the West—to always involve several powers and never give exclusive rights to one, China's territorial integrity would be protected by the contradiction between these powers so that no Chinese military defense was needed while its development needs were secured. A Chinese translation of Sun's book only appeared in 2011 in the People's Republic when foreign investments with special privileges for foreign capital were already well in place.¹⁷⁷ Read in this modern context, Sun's work looks like a blueprint eventually followed by the Communist Party of China during its “reform and opening” period.

The self-assigned Communist heirs of the late Qing reformers, however, continued to trade in the *guafen* story. In 1932, the Ningdu branch of the CCP came out with a pamphlet entitled “Resolution about imperialism's attacking the Soviet Union and partitioning China like a melon and broadening the great revolutionary struggle [against these efforts];”¹⁷⁸ in 1933, the Central Committee of the CCP published a critique of its Guomindang opponents entitled “Open letter to the people of the entire country about the role of the [Guomindang's] five [anti-Communist] Encirclement Campaigns in cutting up China like a melon in the service

176 Sun Yat-sen, *The International Development of China* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922).

177 Sun Zhongshan, *Shiye jihua* 事業計劃 [Plan for industrial development] (Beijing: Waiyu jiaoxue yu yanjiu chubanshe, 2011).

178 Zhongguo Gongchandang, Ningdu linshi xian weiyuanhui, *Guanyu fandui diguozhuyi jinzheng Sulian, guafen Zhongguo yu kuangda geming zhangzheng de queyi* 關於反對帝國主義進攻蘇聯瓜分中國與擴大革命戰爭的決議 (Ningdu, 1932).

of imperialism”;¹⁷⁹ a year later, the Political Department of the Red Peasant and Worker Army published a pamphlet “Down with imperialism cutting China up like a melon.”¹⁸⁰ These titles are just indicators that the *guafen* story in both variants was kept alive as a part of Communist propaganda against the Guomindang as well as against Japan. After the CCP came to power in 1949, the *guafen* narrative was elevated to become the defining feature of imperialist policies towards a China that was trying to preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The story did not gain in factual credibility for either the late Qing or any later period until now. While it is true that at times parts, and sometimes large parts, of China were controlled by foreign powers such as Japan, this was never accepted by the other Powers in the long term. The principal guarantor of Chinese territorial integrity since the late Qing was the United States, which shouldered the main burden of ending Japan’s control over large parts of China during World War II and prevented the Soviet Union from an attack on the Chinese nuclear weapon test site in Xinjiang in 1969, which would possibly have been followed by a Prague-style invasion. Since the implosion of the Soviet Union, the United States has become the main target of Chinese accusations that it works on weakening and partitioning the country. These accusations have gained some traction as a credible and “authentic” narrative for the late Qing. This was not due to historical evidence mustered in support of a sophisticated propaganda, but because of a willingness of many Westerners—including China scholars of the Vietnam War generation—to accept this story as a genuine Chinese grievance about imperialist policies in the past. It should be added that this willingness did not prevent them from being critical of present-day CCP policies and aware of the overarching propaganda purpose of this narrative. The *guafen* story will be found uncritically repeated in the syllabi of many courses in Western universities on Chinese history, as well as in works providing overviews of China’s relations with the West. It vicariously takes off public pressure from balance-of-power politicians who are convinced that China is too big to be allowed to fail.

Like its predecessors in the late Qing court and the Republican governments, the CCP is aware of this dynamics and makes full use of it.

179 Zhongguo Gongchandang Zhongyangweiyuanhui, *Wei diguozhuyi guafen Zhongguo yu Guomindang de wuci weijiao gao quanguo minzhong shu* 為帝國主義瓜分中國與國民黨的五次圍剿告全國民眾書 (n. p., 1933).

180 Zhongguo Gongnong Hongjun Zongzhengzhibu, *Fandui tiguozhuyi guafen Zhongguo* 反對帝國主義瓜分中國 (n. p., 1934).

While continuing its propaganda to accuse the West with the *guafen* story, it continues to calmly rely on Western support for its territorial integrity as well as Western and Japanese capital and technology for its development.¹⁸¹

In recent years, as the Chinese visual universe of the post-Cultural Revolution era has gained traction on the international art market, an older meaning of the *guafen* metaphor was revived by the painter Zeng Fanzhi 曾梵志, namely the dividing of spoils among, for example, the members of a robber band. This meaning of *guafen* had never before been used to deal with the fate of China. Offering a vivid and critical image of China today through an “etymological” reading of the familiar metaphor, it shows that metaphors do not only provide a restricted and concretized form of a concept, but can open surprising new aspects of it. It also shows that the borders between verbal articulations and the iconography of political cartoons and paintings are fluid.

In an ironical turn familiar from many post-Cultural Revolution paintings that play on an alienated Chinese propaganda iconography such as Mao posters, Zeng uses Da Vinci’s *Última cena* (Last Supper, 1494) as his backdrop (figure 29). In Zeng’s painting (figure 30), Jesus and his disciples have been replaced by a band of Chinese Communist Young Pioneers around one central figure. They are sitting in a stately and large hall with Chinese writing scrolls on the walls. According to a surviving sketch Zeng had originally planned to use the Great Hall of the People in Beijing as the backdrop, but then toned down this idea

181 The PRC discussion of the causes why China was not partitioned was closely connected with the state of Chinese-American relations. The narrative of the US “Open Door” intervention to save China from partition was presented in the influential *History of China* in 1960 by Fu Lecheng, a historian with a Harvard PhD teaching in Taiwan. Fu Lecheng 傅樂成, *Zhongguo tongshi* 中國通史 [History of China] (Taibei: Da Zhongguo tushu gongsi, 1960), vol. 2, 692. Since the accusations were voiced that the US were actually planning a new *guafen* of a now fattened China, articles published in the PRC (including those from Taiwan authors) began taking strong issue with Fu Lecheng’s narrative. See Gao Yawei 高亚伟, “Dui Qing mo woguo suoyi neng biamian bei guafen wenti tichu yige xin lunshi—Zhong Xi lishi hudong de gege an yanjiu” 对清末我国所以能避免被瓜分问题提出一个新论释—中西历史互动的一个个案研究 [A new explanation why China was able to avoid partition at the end of the Qing – a study of various issues in Chinese-Western historical interaction], *Guangdong shehuikexue* 6 (1994), 78–84. The discussion was taken up by a series of articles discussing the treatment of this period in schoolbooks since about 2011. The references will be found in Shu Cong 蒯丛, “Zai lun Xifang lieqiang wie sheme meiyou guafen Zhongguo” 再论西方列强为什么没有瓜分中国 [Again about the reasons why the Western Powers did not partition China], *Zhongxue lishi jiaoxue cankao* 4 (2015), 17. For the threat of a renewed US-managed partition, see, for example, Dai Xu 戴旭, “Zhongguo mianlin di sanci bei guafen” 中国面临第三次被瓜分 [China faces a third partition], *Kele* 4 (2010), 5–6.



Fig. 29: *Leonardo da Vinci, Última cena [Last Supper], fresco Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan, 1494.*

as he reworked the painting.¹⁸² The Young Pioneers all look largely alike because their real faces are hidden behind uniform masks, a feature Zeng also used in other paintings. Instead of the bread, melon pieces with their brightly red flesh have been divided among them. Perhaps from the melon juice, their hands are red and some of this red colour has been spilled on their necks, shirts, and even faces, where the masks mostly hide these traces. Judas is the only one not wearing the red scarf of the Young Pioneers, but a golden tie. Zeng's paintings always evince a strong social and political context, which might have spurred his interest in German Expressionist painting of the 1920s as well as Francis Bacon's paintings.¹⁸³ Most of Zeng's paintings have been bought by Western collectors and collections.¹⁸⁴ In 2013, his *The Last Supper* of

182 Sotheby's in Hong Kong, which managed the painting's sale in 2013, attached a well-informed comment to it. It stresses the political symbolism of the melon and quotes Zeng as identifying the figure of Judas and claiming that this golden tie identified him as someone who had gone to the capitalist side. This interpretation glosses over the symbolical meaning of the melon pieces on the table and the direct association of the red colour with blood. The 2001 sketch of with the Great Hall of the People backdrop in illustration 20 on the website below. This text from the Sotheby auction catalogue will be found at <http://www.sothebys.com/zh/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/40th-anniversary-evening-sale-hk0488/lot.48.html>, [Accessed on 20. August 2017].

183 See the article accompanying the Sotheby auction referred to in the previous note.

184 Further knowledgeable background information on this painter has been provided in Zhang Mengwei 張夢薇, "Rujin 'zui gui' de Zeng Fanzhi," 如今「最貴」曾梵志 [Zeng Fanzhi now 'most expensive'], *Wenhui bao* (Hong Kong), November 14, 2013, <http://paper.wenweipo.com> [Accessed on 23. July 2017].



Fig. 30: Zeng Fanzhi 曾梵志, *Zuihou de wancan* 最後的晚餐 [The Last Supper], Oil on canvas, 220 x 400 cm, 2001. © 2017 Zeng Fanzhi.

2001 realized the highest price ever paid for a Chinese painting, 106 million Hong Kong dollars (about 14 million US dollars).

In this painting, the Chinese melon has been divided among a band of Young Pioneers, a select group of students chosen for their “good” political attitudes. Unlike the previous images featured in this essay, no foreigner is depicted. These Young Pioneers are not the ones who brought about the revolution, no older person is among them, they are the children of this older generation, a plausible allegory for the “princeling Party” (*taizi dang* 太子黨), as the children of the first generation of leaders have been dubbed in China. It is they, who are now dominating China’s economic and political life. Their Young Pioneer uniforms signal the generational shift, and their masks mark their unified character as members of this group, who are abiding by a behaviour that is not reflective of their personalities, but of their social standing. In the process of the economic reforms since the 1980s, the socialist collective property in China was largely privatized with the members of the princeling party being the largest beneficiaries, each getting a good share of the melon. This was done not through a cut-throat struggle, but through an agreement reached by the top leadership of the older generation. Consequently, there is no fight for the slices, but a civilized behaviour much reminiscent of the manners of the Powers sharing the various forms of Chinese cake in the images shown earlier from before 1900. Most of the slices have not yet been eaten and are still intact, perhaps an indication that the share in the nation’s wealth that

these princelings received was in property and capital, not simply access to goods for consumption. It might be that the red colour on their hands and faces is to evoke blood as suggested by a fierce critic,¹⁸⁵ but this is doubtful because, as opposed to the revolution, this “last supper” was, generally speaking, not a bloody affair. In this innovative application of the familiar metaphor that again draws on its etymology it is not foreigners grabbing Chinese territory—as the official history has it—, or Chinese bureaucrats selling out the country—as Liang Qichao claimed—, or internal trouble inviting foreign intervention; instead it is China’s wealth—not its territory—that is being partitioned, in this instance among the inheritors of the revolution. The meaning of the painting’s title has changed. Originally referring to the last supper shared by Jesus with his disciples before his crucifixion, it is now the last stage in the life of the China-melon as a cohesive (internally red) body. The figure in the place of Jesus in the middle, mask notwithstanding, has a pensive air, perhaps having second thoughts about the potential outcome. The Judas allusion remains a riddle but possibly it refers to the few bona fide “capitalists” who have been invited to join the Communist Party as representing “the most advanced productive forces.”¹⁸⁶

The painting and its market price did not pass unnoticed. It was accused of not being “pure art,” and its high price was not simply a commercial transaction. Both were in fact highly political. The fierce critic referred to above claimed that the painting’s market success was driven by the United States’ effort to undermine China by the same cultural means it had used to promote the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He identified the painting as dealing with cutting up China like a melon and mentioned the hands as being blood-red, but these accusations remained rather general and were not accompanied by a specific decoding. Perhaps the author was afraid

185 He Qing 河清, “Yifu ‘guafen Zhongguo’ youhua bei gaojia paimai” 一幅“瓜分中国”油画被高价拍卖 [An oil painting about ‘Cutting up China like a melon’ was sold for a high price], written October 5, 2013, <http://www.szhgh.com/article/news/chujian/201310/33686.html>, [Accessed on 23. July 2017].

186 Allusions to the Last Supper are staple food among contemporary Chinese painters. They range from Zhang Hong’s 張宏 1989 painting with Jesus and all the disciples as Mao Zedong symbolizing Maoism as a closed shop where the Chairman only talks to himself and the figure representing Judas being the only one with the little red book of Mao quotations (<https://botanwang.com>, [Accessed on 20. August 2017]) and a set of small Mao sculptures crowding around a Mao in the center trying to get him to support their respective causes by whispering into his ear (<http://attachment.gzdsw.com/forum/201201/08/001000g15n5mk55tnn3j5j.jpg>, [Accessed on 24. August 2017]), to sometimes just silly images of kids having a dinner after passing the university entrance examinations. An array of such Chinese and other references to the Da Vinci painting will be found at <http://bbs.gzdsw.cn/thread-621993-1-1.html>, [Accessed on 20. August 2017].



Fig. 31: Zeng Fanzhi 曾梵志, Xigua 西瓜 [Watermelon], Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm, 2004. © 2017 Zeng Fanzhi.

that a translation of the painting into straight political language might evoke an all too positive echo.

This is not the last melon painting by Zeng Fanzhi. A 2004 work in a different style of diffuse strokes, *luanbi* 亂筆, shows a melon that has been cut (figure 31). There is no further context, but the image directly evokes a mouth shouting to heaven. The melon is in a helpless position, lying on its “back.” Like the reference to da Vinci’s *Última cena*, the image directly evokes another iconic painting, the woodblock *Roar! China* by Li Hua 李樺, which has been endlessly reproduced as the image of China’s resistance against government and foreign oppression during the 1930s (figure 32).



Fig. 32: *Li Hua* 李樺, *Nuhouba! Zhongguo 怒吼吧! 中國* [Roar! China], 1935. Source: *Zhongguo xin xing ban hua wushi nian xuan ji* [Fifty years of new-style Chinese woodcuts, a selection] (Shanghai: *Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe*, 1981), no. 34.

Such an interpretation would mean that China as a collective is crying out in helpless protest. As opposed to *The Last Supper*, no particular object is fixed in this powerful painting of the melon, inviting the spectator to fill it with his or her own experience.

Conclusions

This study set out to explore, in a critical departure from existing practices and methodologies, the dynamics of transcultural interaction in the formation of concepts; the role of platforms other than words in articulating concepts; the impact of the systemic environment of concepts and that of the actual usage of concepts on their valuation, the agenda associated

with them, and their antonyms; the reach of their application in public discourse and the efforts to expand it to gain hegemony; the benefits and costs of their metaphorical visualization; their place in a contest about an accurate reflection of historical reality, and their continued use in propaganda after historical reality had falsified their definitory claim. For each of these questions, different methodological steps had to be taken. These ranged from the study of translated concepts in a given cultural environment to statistics of their use in different media with their distinct audiences; from a study of the application of these verbal and visual translations to particular cases to mapping their standing in specialized conceptual hierarchies, and from tracing the history of the use and role of etymology in tying down a meaning to analysing the coding of political cartoons and paintings.

The case study was the Chinese concept of *guafen*, melonwise cutting. The results show that every part of the development, standardization, application, and contextualization of this translation concept for “partition” was transcultural in character, including the idea itself to frame a discussion about China in a world context. This highlighted the futility of a nation-state bound conceptual history once postulated by Koselleck and followed up by many case studies of concepts in a single-language environment.

Guafen is an older expression that ended up winning against various single-character or binomial verbs in the Chinese vernacular and being stabilized as a transitive noun and verb to translate “partition.” The agency in forming this translation term lies not with some imperial power imposing it, but with Chinese writers and foreigners literate in Chinese. The term became stabilized as the translation for “partition” through the authority of its use in Martin’s 1862 Chinese translation of Wheaton’s *International Law*. Intrinsically a neutral term, “partition” and with it *guafen* developed negative connotations from the association with the partition of Poland in contrast to the “coming together” of the United States as an independent country or the strengthening of a nation’s cohesion and power through reforms led by a scion of the ruling house. Partition and with it *guafen* was discussed in international law against the backdrop of an increasingly shared notion that sovereignty belonged to the nation state and not to the ruler, and that sovereignty included a claim to territorial integrity. This systemic context of “partition”—including its standing in the hierarchy of legal principles—, the cases to which it applied, and the validation these applications received in the discussion of legal professionals and historians were transferred to *guafen*.

The history of the use of this concept in and for China went through several stages and substantial changes. Since the 1860s, there had been an international discussion—in which the Chinese did not participate but which was recorded in the Chinese English-language press—whether the governance offered by the Qing court could avoid a break-up of the country that in turn might be followed by a partition with various outside powers taking over the administration of parts of the territory. In these discussions, which were public in character, the partition of China was seen not as a goal but as a threat to international stability and the balance of powers. The basic consensus among the Powers was that China's governance should be strengthened and that the territorial integrity of China proper should be maintained. Whenever one of the Powers strayed from this consensus, the others, led by the dominant power, first Great Britain which already by 1900 was replaced by the United States, would unite to oppose it. This remained the persistent pattern throughout the twentieth century.

The Chinese discussion about a danger of partition began out of public Chinese view during the 1870s. It reacted to Russia's intervention in Ili to put down a Muslim rebellion, but also, more importantly, to Western reports, books, and diplomatic communications made accessible in Chinese that warned about a Russian push to the Far East after its efforts to gain a foothold in the Mediterranean warm water ports had failed. This discussion gained momentum and began to be carried by public media after China's defeat in the war with Japan. A group of young men-of-letters around Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao adopted the narrative of a threatened *guafen* of China that came with the proviso that only a fundamental reform of Chinese governance would be able to forestall it. Using petitions to the court and public media such as newly-founded periodicals, they tried to recruit young male literate urbanites for this agenda and set up associations of a regional and national nature to enhance the political pressure these young men would be able to exert. The trust of the reformers in the willingness of any sizeable part of the Chinese population to become engaged in the patriotic goal of preserving the nation was low. Accordingly, they did not favour a constitution and a parliament but set their hopes on a top-down reform. They tried to gain protection and support from high officials with the ultimate aim to have the Guangxu Emperor lead the reforms by emulating, under their guidance, not George Washington, but Peter the Great or the Meiji Emperor. The *guafen* narrative and agenda did not, however, manage to get adopted outside the reform papers even though the reformers tried to enhance its standing by showing that it closely agreed with much of

international opinion. When for a short while in 1898 the Guangxu Emperor seemed to support them, they tried to insert the *guafen* narrative and agenda into official discourse. With the failure of the Hundred Days Reform in September 1898 and their ensuing exile, this effort came to naught. In an effort to maintain their political standing, the reformers changed the *guafen* narrative to blame the government's selling out, rather than the greed of foreigners, for a partition, while trying to expand the social base of their agenda by establishing new print venues for their advocacy as well as their extensive writing. At this stage, however, they found themselves sidelined within the rapid development of the Shanghai commercial periodical and book market. The effort to reach wider popular audiences received a certain boost from an etymological rediscovery of the largely forgotten metaphorical meaning of *guafen* that prompted the use of the watermelon as a symbol for China in visual representations.

The foreshortening of the concept “partition” through its translation into *guafen* and the fixation on the Polish case weakened the analytical openness of the original term. On the other hand, it strengthened the potential use of the Chinese translation for critique and advocacy of action. Of the three late Qing narratives for Poland's partition—imperialism, dysfunctional polity, and popular resistance—the reformers around Liang Qichao began with the first. They switched to the second after the end of the Hundred Days Reforms in late 1898, a reading that was eventually adopted by the early Chinese Communist movement. The power of the *guafen* concept and agenda via “partition” suffered from this shift. While “selling out the country” in the abstract would still qualify as a cause for “partition,” because even a country divided into zones of influence could be loosely defined as partitioned, selling slices of watermelon did not fit the process because these are consumed or taken home by the buyers. This, however, did not fit the reality of term leases of territory or privileges to build railway lines and exploit mines in China. The problem shows up in efforts to define the “invisible partition” as even more dangerous than its manifest form, and in the awkward detours of the early Chinese political cartoons to accommodate the image of the melon slicing to the historical realities of foreign infrastructure investments.

The melon and its slices in the visual representation of China's *guafen* “translate” the depiction of China as a cake or other delicacy to be shared in Western political cartoons. In the narrative of the Chinese reformers, China was not safeguarded by the conflicts between the Powers. Accordingly, the image of a largely harmonious “family feast” in pre-1900 Western cartoons with their implied reference to international

law dominating the guests' behaviour finds no echo in the Chinese images of the first two decades of the twentieth century. While the Western cartoonists, however, switched gear in their depiction of China once the actual danger of a break-up or partition was over, their Chinese counterparts stuck to the dysfunctional image, a sign both of overriding advocacy concerns and lacking maturity. It is therefore proposed that concepts in the form of words, metaphors, and images cross cultural and language borders through "translation." The result is the formation of a transcultural and translingual vernacular for words, metaphors, and images that is largely invisible on the surface but retains strong links over time among the connected items.

The acceptance of *guafen* as a real threat for China remained largely restricted to a set of reformers and revolutionaries whose agenda it served. It remained a marginal advocacy term in internal Chinese politics that was furthermore disproved by history and failed to gain discursive hegemony until the heirs of the reformers and revolutionaries gained political power and with it control over public articulation in the People's Republic of China. The first and third variant of the Poland narrative became a mainstream frame for PRC foreign propaganda once the CCP had established its discursive control. While this discursive control is extensive by any standard, extending down to schoolbooks, historical scholarship, and the press, it remains open to, at least, allegorical challenge. Examples are Zeng Fanzhi's melon paintings. His *The Last Supper* uses an aspect of the "etymology" of *guafen*, namely sharing the spoils that had not been in the political applications of this term as a satire on the political leadership. His "Watermelon" inverts the pervasive lack of agency on part of the melon (or that of the other delicacies) that can be seen in the early depictions, by turning the melon slice into a collective shout of "China's" protest.

Guafen is not simply a "concept" in the rarefied realm of thought. It claimed to reflect a historical reality and derived an agenda from this claim. It challenged other assessments and agendas, most prominently that of the Qing court. The Powers' attitude to China has been accurately described by Viscount Wolseley as dictated by the "victor's dilemma" of having to prevent China from breaking up even when it had lost in a military conflict and steadfastly refused to accede to Western demands to open the country for trade. Far from pursuing the partition of China, regardless of their different interests, a strong combination of foreign powers with the United States being most prominent already since the late 1890s was in fact the sole guarantee for the territorial integrity of

China proper.¹⁸⁷ The Chinese government had little agency in influencing the Powers, but was implicitly conscious of their dilemma and contributed to keep them all on board through its use of the most favoured nation clause. Even in the eyes of the reformers, there was no popular acceptance of the *guafen* narrative at the time and no broad resistance to the prospect of partition. While the Qing court did not go public with its views, the reformers were keenly aware of the court's trump card: The Powers could partition China if they wanted, but as they did not do it, they must be opposed to it because it would have upset the balance among them. This was quite independent of the behavior of the court toward them. They could be relied upon to rescue the Chinese government and its finances without any price having to be paid by China.

The Powers' motives were not love for China, but maintaining balance of power, gaining unimpeded market access, and preventing the collapse of an entity too big to be allowed to fail. This is most evident in 1900 when the Qing court, which had supported the anti-foreign riots of the Boxers, was in full flight after the allied invasion. If ever there was a moment when a partition of China looked inevitable, this was it, because there was no government of any standing with which to negotiate and foreign troops were already in control of Peking. The Powers, however, pressed for reforms, kept the dynasty in place, and pushed back against Russia and France who were seen as eyeing to secure colony-type territories.

It has to be remembered that the Qing dynasty ended with its largest territorial expansion intact at the moment of its most manifest weakness. The same constellation remained in place during World War II and even during the Cold War when the US firmly rejected a 1969 Soviet request to consent to their launching a nuclear attack on Chinese test sites in Xinjiang that might have been followed by a Prague style invasion, a threat taken very seriously by the Chinese leadership. As a result, none of the foreign powers was able to hold on to long-term exclusive control because the others would join together to prevent this. Whatever might be

187 A similar argument was made by Ja Lan Chong. He argued, "the key to China's resilience against complete fragmentation between the end of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth lay in the nature of external competition over and intervention into the polity. That the foreign governments most active in and around China generally saw it as an area of secondary import, and not worth a major armed conflict, gave the various outside powers a stake in seeking settlements among themselves. This brought simultaneous external financial, economic, and even military backing for central governments as well as various regional administrations, a dynamic that kept the Chinese polity whole even as it deepened fractures across the country." "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do: Foreign Intervention and the Limiting of Fragmentation in the Late Qing and Early Republic, 1893–1922," *Twentieth Century China* 35.1 (2009): 76.

the particular cause and reason for a given crisis or failure, the dominant powers will find it in their interest to bail China out, and the Chinese government, aware of this dilemma, has made generous use of the leeway accorded it through this constellation.

The asymmetry of power and agency in the relationship between China and the Powers turned out to be China's greatest asset. In the graphic depictions discussed above, China is the passive object of desire, while in verbalized statements, China's level of agency at the time is described in terms such as "asleep," "dead," "corrupt to the core," "incompetent," "weak," "passive," and "negligible." The "passive agency" of China's threatened collapse turns out to be a nimble instrument that was efficiently used by the Qing court and later governments.

The Power's intention to "*guafen*" China became a frequently used accusation in PRC international relations. Its use steeply increased after the end of the Vietnam War and the demise of the Soviet Union when only the United States remained as a dominant power. While the partition narrative was never internationally accepted as a real ongoing threat, it has entered the historical narrative of late Qing-foreign relations as a historical debt of imperialism. This narrative derived its strength not because it could explain the historical process or from the authority of the Chinese propaganda organs but from the willingness of the post-Vietnam-War United States and much of its intellectual establishment to honor the narrative of a victimized China as authentic regardless of its weak historical foundation.