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Translating and transplanting revolution: the circulation of discourses on the American Revolution between China and Japan

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Abstract

The American Revolution, as recent studies have shown, was appropriated by Chinese revolutionaries to use in their anti-Manchu propaganda in the early twentieth century. Few scholars have fully recognised Japan's important role in mediating Chinese revolutionaries' understanding of the American Revolution. This article aims to bridge the gaps in existing scholarship through a close reading of Chinese and Japanese writings on the American Revolution in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I will show that Chinese and Japanese elites' understanding of the American Revolution was structured by the changing power relations between China, Japan, and the West. Before Chinese and Japanese elites internalised the ideology of Western cultural superiority, the former inspired the latter to see the American Revolution through a Confucian lens. After the ideology of Western cultural superiority became entrenched in Japan, Japanese elites reinterpreted the American Revolution through the lens of Western ideas of liberty, civil rights, and popular sovereignty. Their new interpretation, in turn, inspired Chinese revolutionaries in Meiji Japan to view the American Revolution as a model for their anti-Manchu revolution in the 1900s when the ideology of Western cultural superiority started to take root in China.

Keywords: American Revolution; translation; Meiji Japan; Qing China; the Chinese Revolution of 1911

On 22 February 1784, the fifty-second birthday of George Washington (1732–1799), a ship named *Empress of China* sailed towards Qing China then ruled by the Qianlong emperor (1711–1799). The ship was initially built as a privateer for the American Independence War, but by the time its construction was completed in 1783, the war was already about to be concluded with the Treaty of Paris. The idling privateer was then converted into a cargo ship to open trade with China. This was the first attempt made by Americans to reach China, a mysterious empire located on the other side of the earth. The chance of failure was extremely high, but this attempt was considered worth the risk. The ship's cargo—primarily ginseng roots and Spanish silver coins—promised both dazzling profits and a new market to fill the trade vacuum that was expected to rise after America formally split from Britain and the old colonial trade network. Therefore, Captain John Green (1736–1796), a Philadelphian navy officer on a leave of absence, must have been very anxious during the several weeks prior to departure when he had to wait for the ice near the New York Harbor to clear. In contrast to the nerve-wracking pre-departure wait, Green's journey was blessed with luck. After around six months at sea, the ship

arrived in Guangdong on 28 August 1784.¹ When building the *Empress of China*, none of the workers in the shipyard could have imagined that the war machine would be sent on a journey to China as a cargo ship. Nor would Green and his crew members have dared to imagine, even in their wildest dreams, that many Chinese revolutionaries in the early twentieth century were eager to restage the American Independence War that the ship had missed. This article unearths the unexpected endeavours made by Chinese elites to transplant the American Revolution to their homeland.

A few scholars have shown us that Chinese revolutionaries appropriated the American Revolution to propagate their anti-Manchu movement in the early twentieth century.² Some of them have noticed that an important part of Chinese knowledge about the American Revolution actually came from Meiji Japan.³ Despite that, with their analysis focused primarily on Chinese texts, there is little discussion of Japanese sources. Consequently, their studies fall short when we try to find out how Japanese discourses on the American Revolution shaped Chinese elites' understanding of the same event. This article examines Japan's overlooked role in mediating Chinese elites' understanding of the American Revolution by providing a close reading of Chinese writings against those of their Japanese counterparts.

As an overdue study of Japanese influence on Chinese revolutionaries' perception of the American Revolution, this article, nevertheless, does not tell a story about the unidirectional flow of Japanese knowledge to China. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that many terms and discourses, which are often assumed to have been created in Japan and later introduced to China were, in fact, first invented in China. They were subsequently imported into Japan and finally returned to China after being refashioned by Japanese elites.⁴ The present study joins recent efforts made by scholars to explore the circulation of knowledge between Japan and China. In this article I show how Chinese and Japanese discourses on the American Revolution circulated between China and Japan and influenced each other in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Moreover, while aiming to compare Japanese and Chinese translations of the American Revolution, this article does not intend to provide an exhaustive study of the translation of specific terms or concepts. Instead, my purpose is to use the changing image of the American Revolution as a lens through which to explore Japan-mediated Chinese

¹ P. C. F. Smith, *The Empress of China* (Philadelphia, 1984), pp. 3–4, 12, 19 and 25.

² D. Yu 俞旦初, 'Meiguó dulishi zai jindai Zhongguo jidai de jieshao he yingxiang' 美國獨立史在近代中國的介紹和影響, *Shijie lishi* 世界歷史 2 (1987), pp. 71–80; Z. Zou 鄒振環, "'Geming bioamu" yu wanqing yingxiang xipu de chongjian—Huashengdun he Napulun zhuanji de yikan jiqi yingxiang' '革命表木'與晚清英雄系譜的重建—華盛頓和拿破崙傳記文獻的譯刊及其影響, *Lishi wenxian* 歷史文獻 9 (2005), pp. 393–425; K. Pan 潘光哲, 'Meiguó duli xuanyan zai wanqing Zhongguo' 美國獨立宣言在晚清中國, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊57 (2007), pp. 28–42; K. Pan 潘光哲, *Huashengdun shenhua yu jindai Zhongguo zhengzhi wenhua* 華盛頓神話與近代中國政治文化 (Taipei, 2006), pp. 97–136; Y. Xiong 熊月之, 'Huashengdun xingxiang de Zhongguo jiedu jiqi dui xinhai geming de yingxiang' 華盛頓形象的中國解讀及其對辛亥革命的影響, *Shilin* 史林 1 (2012), pp. 98–103; Rudolf G. Wagner, 'Living up to the images of the ideal public leader: George Washington's image in China', *The Journal of Transcultural Studies* 10.2 (2019), pp. 59–60; Z. Ai 艾周昌, 'Huashengdun yu Zhongguo' 華盛頓與中國, *Lishi jiaoxue wenti* 歷史教學問題 3 (1984), pp. 16–17.

³ Yu, 'Meiguó dulishi', pp. 61–8; Xiong, 'Huashengdun xingxiang', pp. 96–97; Pan, *Huashengdun shenhua*, pp. 60–62; Pan, 'Meiguó duli xuanyan', pp. 23–26.

⁴ L. Chen 陳力衛, *Wasei Kango no keisei to sono tenkai* 和製漢語的形成とその展開 (Tokyo, 2001); L. Chen 陳力衛, *Kindai chi no honyaku to denpa: kango wo bankai ni* 近代知的翻譯と傳播：漢語を媒介に (Tokyo, 2019); G. Shen 沈國威, *Kindai nichū goi kōryūshi—shinkango no seisei to juyō* 近代日中語彙交流史—新漢語の生成と受容 (Tokyo, 1994); G. Shen 沈國威, *Xinyu wanghuan: Zhongri jindai yuyan jiaoshe shi* 新語往還：中日近代語言交涉史 (Beijing, 2020); F. Chen, 'Rediscovering the Yellow River and the Yangtze River: the circulation of discourses on the North–South dichotomy between Late Qing China and Meiji Japan', *International Journal of Asian Studies* 16 (2019), pp. 33–51.

translation of Western political culture. The translation of culture, as Lydia H. Liu reminds us, is neither a process of finding equivalent elements in two cultures nor a process of reproducing the meaning encoded in the original text. Translation, for Liu, is rather a translingual practice whereby ‘new words, meanings, discourse, and modes of representation arise, circulate, and acquire legitimacy within the host language due to, or in spite of, the latter’s contact/collision with the guest language’.⁵ In other words, the translator invents equivalence between different things and produces new meaning through translation. This article examines how the agency of Chinese and Japanese translators allowed them to produce translations of the American Revolution that deviated significantly from the American originals, and how their agency was also constrained by the new power relations between China, Japan, and the West which started to emerge in the late 1890s.

In the following sections I will first provide a brief review of the American Revolution and its historiography. I go on to survey Chinese and Japanese sources of knowledge on the American Revolution in the early and mid-nineteenth century and explain why they were both framed within Confucian terms and ideology. Then I compare Japanese and Chinese translations and discourses on the American Revolution produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I will demonstrate that from the late nineteenth century onwards, Japanese elites started to liberate the American Revolution from the Confucian framework and reinterpret it as a nation’s pursuit of liberty, civil rights, and popular sovereignty. The Japanese discourses, I argue, shaped the perception of the American Revolution among Chinese elites in Meiji Japan and inspired them to propagate their anti-Manchu revolution as a Chinese equivalent of the American Independence War.

The American Revolution as events and histories

The American Revolution broke out as a response to a series of new attempts by Britain to exploit its 13 colonies in North America. Ever since the establishment of the first colony—Jamestown—in 1607, British colonists had long enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and paid considerably fewer taxes than their fellows in England. The situation, however, started to change in 1763. That year marked the ending of the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763), which the British and the French brought to Europe, North America, South America, West Africa, and India. In order to raise funds to pay the enormous debts incurred by the war and meet the increased cost of defending the colonies in North America, the British parliament had passed a series of acts to impose new taxes on British colonists in North America or increase the existing tax rates. The Sugar Act of 1764 introduced stricter measures to collect tax on sugar and molasses, which were an important component of colonial trade in North America. The Stamp Act of 1765 imposed direct tax on British colonies in North America for the first time by demanding that all official documents, newspapers, almanacs, and pamphlets have stamps on them. The Townshend Acts of 1767 placed duties on staple goods like paper, glass, and tea. Besides these acts, which were designed to maximise revenue, British colonists were also antagonised by acts passed by the British parliament in the aftermath of the Boston Tea Party to restrict their rights. The Boston Tea Party was a protest against the Tea Act of 1773, which was passed by the British parliament to help the deeply troubled British East India Company sell its tea by removing duties on the tea it exported to British colonies in North America. As this act enabled the company to monopolise the tea market in the colonies, British colonists resented it and protested by throwing the

⁵ L. H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, 1995), pp. 3–20, 25–27.

company's goods into the Boston Harbor. In retaliation, the British parliament passed four punitive acts in 1774. The Quartering Act required the local governments of British colonies in North America to provide British soldiers with housing and food. The Massachusetts Government Act changed the Massachusetts Charter and placed constraints on town meetings. The Administration of Justice Act stipulated that the trials of British soldiers should be held in Britain rather than in the colonies. The Boston Port Act temporarily closed the Boston Port until the British merchants were compensated for the tea they lost in 1773. These acts jointly escalated the tension between the imperial metropole and colonies into a war that broke out on 19 April 1775 when the Massachusetts militia launched an assault on the British army in Boston.⁶

In its initial stages, the American Revolution might not have looked very different from other rebellions against the rulers that occurred across the globe during the eighteenth century. Many British colonists' demands were quite humble—they merely sought the rescission of several acts of parliament and were ready to reconcile with Britain in one way or another when the time was right. However, as the war progressed, they made new demands that distinguished their revolution from other rebellions in the eighteenth century. These demands were most clearly spelled out by the United States Declaration of Independence promulgated in 1776. The representatives of 13 British colonies gathered in Philadelphia to announce their demand for independence. They justified their demand as the pursuit of men's 'inalienable rights' endowed by their Creator, including 'Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness'. They declared, 'to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed' and 'whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government'. King George III (1738–1820), by their account, had violated their inalienable rights by establishing 'an absolute Tyranny' over the colonies. They thus asserted that the king's rule over British colonies in North America should be overthrown.⁷ Through the declaration, British colonists cast their revolution as something much bigger than an anti-tax movement or a rebellion against a tyrant. Not only did they denounce exploitative and repressive policies, just as rebels in other countries had done, they also relied on the ideas of liberty and natural rights to reject the entire political system that governed relations between the imperial metropole and colonies, and between the ruler and his subjects. The declaration was certainly a form of war propaganda aimed at mass mobilisation, but it was also more than that. It served as a guiding principle for British colonists to organise their own state after they gained independence. They wrote liberty and natural rights into a constitution promulgated in 1787, which integrated independent states into a republic. They provided further protection of personal freedom and rights and placed more limitations on the government's power through ten amendments to the constitution introduced in 1791.⁸

The British colonists' passionate promotion of liberty and natural rights in the American Revolution significantly shaped historical accounts of this movement.⁹ It inspired many American elites in the nineteenth century to provide a Whig interpretation of the American Revolution. Their narratives, though the detail varies, tend to interpret the revolution as a sublime struggle to protect liberty and natural rights from the British

⁶ F. D. Cogliano, *Revolutionary America, 1763–1815: A Political History*, 2nd edn (London, 2009), pp. 49–96.

⁷ 'Declaration of Independence: A Transcription', National Archives, 1776, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript> (accessed 20 March 2023).

⁸ Cogliano, *Revolutionary America*, pp. 155–180.

⁹ For a concise summary of the historiography of the American Revolution, see J. E. Selby, 'Revolutionary America: the historiography', *OAH Magazine of History* 8 (1994), pp. 5–8.

king's tyranny.¹⁰ The Whig interpretation dominated the historiography of the American Revolution for most of the nineteenth century, but was seriously challenged in the following century. Some of the earliest challenges came from historians who were later placed in the Imperial School. After revisiting what American revolutionaries condemned as British tyranny, these historians argued that British policies towards America were far less oppressive than the revolutionaries had claimed. In particular, the 13 colonies' prosperity prior to 1763 was in fact the result of Britain's mild colonial policies; Britain's attempts to regulate trade and increase tax on colonies were not completely unreasonable because Britain needed to deal with the enormous war expense and had only levied a light tax on its colonies in North America. Historians of the Imperial School also found that there were no grounds for American revolutionaries' condemnation of the British king's meddling in parliamentary politics. British rules in the eighteenth century did not require the monarch to stay out of parliamentary politics; and the king's presence in parliament was actually necessary at this time as only he, rather than the legislative parties, was able to effectively organise parliament. What triggered American resentment towards the British, according to these historians, was more the mismanagement of colonial affairs due to miscalculation than any plot to repress colonists in North America.¹¹ In the early twentieth century another group of historians cast doubt upon the image of the American Revolution as a pure pursuit of liberty and natural rights. They emphasised the socio-economic division among colonists, which created class conflicts between the elite and poorer groups in the American Revolution, and provided a Progressive interpretation of the movement. According to them, the revolution was an internal conflict between elite and poorer colonists as much as it was an inter-national struggle. Not only was it a political revolution that altered the relationship between the British and the Americans, but it was also a social revolution that restructured colonial society.¹²

While the Imperial and the Progressive interpretations deepened our understanding of the American Revolution by revealing previously overlooked facets of the movement, they were unable to negate entirely the Whig interpretation of the American Revolution. The Imperial interpretation failed to explain revolutionaries' demand for a republic that was completely different from the British monarchy. The Progressive interpretation often exaggerated the conflict within colonial society as well as the social change brought about by the revolution. A new generation of historians, later known as the neo-Whigs, filled in these gaps by drawing attention to an enormous body of political discourses produced before and during the American Revolution. They revealed a striking preoccupation with liberty, natural rights, and the constitution among revolutionaries, which neither the Whig historians nor the Progressive or Imperial schools had ever acknowledged.¹³

It is tempting to survey more historical accounts of the American Revolution, especially recent ones that are focused on previously understudied actors like women and

¹⁰ For a representative Whig interpretation of the American Revolution, see G. Bancroft, *History of the United States of America: From the Discovery of the American Continent* (Boston, 1842–1854).

¹¹ For representative works that reconsider British tyranny, see G. L. Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754–1765* (New York, 1907); C. M. Andrews, *The Colonial Background of the American Revolution: Four Essays in American Colonial History* (New Haven, 1924); L. B. Naimier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, 2 vols (London, 1929); L. B. Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London, 1930); L. H. Gipson, *The British Empire before the American Revolution*, 15 vols (New York, 1961).

¹² For the Progressive interpretation of the American Revolution, see C. L. Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776* (Madison, 1909); C. H. Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania, 1760–1776* (Philadelphia, 1901); A. M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution* (New York, 1918); J. F. Jameson, *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement* (Princeton, 1926).

¹³ B. Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967); G. S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969).

slaves, but I believe it is perhaps more productive to consider the implications of these interpretations for our understanding of the American Revolution. That is, notwithstanding their differences, they jointly show us that the multifaceted revolution was too complex to be explained through a single line of theories. The war broke out as a protest against the attempts made by the British parliament to raise revenue and tighten control over the colonies, but it soon acquired the under-colour of a struggle for liberty, natural rights, and popular sovereignty. Revolutionaries portrayed their actions as the pursuit of independence from British tyranny, but Britain's colonial policies were actually less oppressive than they claimed them to be and the American nation was more divided than had been assumed. Despite the complexity of the American Revolution, both Chinese and Japanese elites in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as we will see in the following sections, took great pains to fit it within a single frame of explanation—first, a Confucian frame and then, a Whig frame.

The discovery of the American Revolution in China

The earliest known record of the American Revolution in China can be found in *Hailu* 海錄 (A Record of Sea) (1820), a book written by Yang Bingnan 楊炳南 and based on Xie Qinggao's 謝清高 (1765–1821) overseas experience.¹⁴ The book explained the establishment of America in a single sentence—'(America) was originally *fen* 分 (divided) and *feng* 封 (bestowed) by England, but now became an independent state.'¹⁵ The relationship between Britain and colonial America, according to Yang and Xie, resembled the relationship between the king and feudal lords in the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BC). Just as King Wu of the Zhou dynasty had created a feudal state by dividing the conquered lands and bestowing them on the lords in exchange of their loyalty, the British king had 'divided' his lands and 'bestowed' one of them—America—on his subjects.

Nearly two decades later, Elijah Coleman Bridgman (1801–1861), an American missionary who lived in Guangdong for a few years, provided the first comprehensive narrative of the American Revolution in a Chinese language. Bridgman devoted to the revolution an entire volume of his multi-volume book *Meilige heshengguo zhilüe* 美理哥合省國志略 (A Brief Account of the United States of America), which was initially published in Singapore in 1838 and republished in Hong Kong with minor revisions six years later.¹⁶ He described the revolution basically as a protest against the British king's decision to increase taxes and did not mention the role of the British parliament in changing tax policy. The independence of America in his narrative thus looks like a variation of the anti-tax movement that had been staged many times in imperial China.

Equally noteworthy is Bridgman's understatement of the ideas of liberty and inalienable rights. We can better understand this issue by looking at Bridgman's translation of the Declaration of Independence. In the second paragraph of the original text, the founding fathers of America spelled out some foundational principles that justified their rebellion:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life,

¹⁴ Q. Xie 謝清高 and B. Yang 楊炳南, *Hailu Jiaoshi* 海錄校釋, (ed. and trans.) J. An 安京 (Beijing, 2002), p. 1. See also Yu, 'Meiguo dulishi', p. 60.

¹⁵ Xie and Yang, *Hailu Jiaoshi*, p. 264.

¹⁶ The second edition of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* is entitled *Yamolige hezhongguo zhilüe* 亞墨理格合眾國誌略. Because there is no significant difference between the first edition and second edition that substantially alters the meanings of texts, I discuss only the first edition. For a comparison between the two editions, see X. Li 李曉傑, 'Gao Liwen *Meilige heshengguo zhilüe* tanjiu' 高理文《美理哥合省國志略》探究, *Wakumon* 或問 7 (2004), p. 32; see also note 48 in Pan, 'Meiguo dili xuanyan', p. 13.

Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, —That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.¹⁷

Bridgman translated this sentence as:

The people under Heaven all believe in the following principle. The God creates the people who have the same bodies despite their differences in size. They are born with their lives and their own positions. The state is established to regulate the people so that they will not misbehave and their lives can rely on it. If (the state) does not support (the people), why do (we) need it?¹⁸

If we compare the original and the translation, we find many significant differences between them. Chiefly, the core of the ‘truths’—inalienable rights—in the original is absent in the translation, though the idea of equality is retained in a revised form. Equally important is a change made to the relationship between the government and the people. In the original text, the government is believed to be created for the people and based on their consent. Yet the translation abandons this principle of popular sovereignty: it acknowledges that the government should act in the interests of the people, but no longer insists that the government has to be established according to people’s consent.

Unlike Xie Qinggao and Yang Bingnan, whose understanding of America was perhaps limited, Bridgman had a very clear idea of his homeland. His understanding of the American Revolution was very likely shaped by the Whig interpretation that was pre-eminent in his time. The omission of the role of the British parliament in taxation and the simplification of the Declaration of Independence were, therefore, not very likely to have been a mistake resulting from ignorance of their significance. They were more likely intended by Bridgman to help his readers understand foreign events. In so doing, the alienness of the American Revolution was diluted and it was rendered into an uprising against tyranny, with which his Chinese readers were familiar.

The first two editions of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* perhaps constituted the most important sources for Chinese elites to understand the American Revolution until 1860, as there was no other work in China that could rival its depth and width or its American author’s credibility. The book served as the primary material for Chinese elites’ works on foreign affairs, such as Wei Yuan’s 魏源 (1794–1857) *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志 (The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms) (1843), Liang Tingnan’s 梁廷楠 (1796–1861) *Heshengguo shuo* 合省國說 (The Accounts of the United States) (1844), and Xu Jiyü’s 徐繼畲 (1795–1873) *Yinghuan zhilüe* 瀛寰志略 (A Short Account of the Maritime Circuit) (1849).¹⁹ While the three authors followed Bridgman

¹⁷ ‘Declaration of Independence: A Transcription’, 1776.

¹⁸ E. C. Bridgman, *Meilige heshengguo zhilüe* 美理哥合省國志略, vol. 4 (Singapore, 1838), p. 2.

¹⁹ Xu Jiyü did not explicitly reference Bridgman in *A Short Account of the Maritime Circuit*. But Bridgman stated that Xu Jiyü used materials from *A Brief Account of the United States of America* to write his book. Pan Kuang-che argues that Xu did not cite Bridgman. Yet Li Xiaojie found a strong resemblance between the text of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* and that of *A Short Account of the Maritime Circuit*. It is quite likely that Xu used materials from Bridgman’s work without explicitly referencing it. For Bridgman’s statement, see E. C. Bridgman, ‘zixu’ 自序, in *Damei lianbang zhilüe* 大美聯邦志略 (Shanghai, 1861), p. 1. For Pan Kuang-che’s discussion, see note 55 in Pan, ‘Meiguo duli xuanyan’, p. 16. For Li Xiaojie’s textual comparison, see Li, ‘Gao Liwen Meilige heshengguo zhilüe tanjiu’, pp. 37–38. For the use of *A Brief Account of the United States of America*

to describe the American Revolution as an anti-tax movement, they all made changes to his wording, especially his translation of the Declaration of Independence. The greatest change appeared in Xu's book, in which the entire declaration vanished. Liang's book reduced the declaration to several lines: the ideas of equality, liberty, and inalienable rights were omitted; the second paragraph was rendered as 'because the King increased the taxes and tortured us in an unreasonable way, we established a new government to guard our own land. We had no other choices.'²⁰ In contrast, Wei Yuan's writing was closer to Bridgman's translation of the declaration. He wrote,

The God creates the people. All the races have the same bodies. They are bestowed lives so that they will be content with their own positions. For the fear that the strong will bully the weak, the majority will abuse the minority, and the people will become stupid, stubborn, and unaccultured, a ruler is erected (by the God) to regulate and support the people rather than exploit them.²¹

Wei, like Bridgman, presented an ambiguous idea of equality and omitted the principle of inalienable rights and popular sovereignty. But, at the same time, he provided an elaborate description of people's immoral behaviour, which cannot be found in Bridgman's original.

Xu Jiyü, Liang Tingnan, and Wei Yuan felt free to omit, simplify, or expand Bridgman's translation, probably because they did not consider the declaration very different from slogans raised in numerous rebellions against unreasonable taxation in the history of imperial China. Yet we should not blame Chinese elites' misunderstanding of the American Revolution solely on Bridgman. Wei's death in 1857 meant that he never had the opportunity to renew his understanding of the American Revolution, but Liang and Xu were able to read other sources on the American Revolution that were published after 1860. The most important of these works was perhaps the third edition of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* published by Bridgman in 1861.²² In this edition Bridgman restored some important messages that had been lost in his translation of the Declaration of Independence in the first edition. The first half of the second paragraph of the declaration was translated as:

People, after being created, obtain from their creators the same principle, which they cannot abandon and others cannot take away. This principle is natural and aimed at protecting life, self-determination, and independence. In order to protect this principle, a government has to be established in accordance with the will of the people. If the government betrays this principle, (it) should be corrected by the people.²³

The ideas of equality, inalienable rights, and popular sovereignty are all present in this new translation, though the pursuit of happiness is not included as an inalienable right.

Another opportunity available to Chinese elites, though not to Liang Tingnan and Xu Jiyü, was provided by Devello Zelotos Sheffield (1841–1913), an American missionary. Sheffield taught at the Luhe zhongxue 潞河中學 (Luhe Middle School) in Beijing from the early 1870s and became its principal in the late 1880s. He compiled a

in *Accounts on America*, see Y. Luo 駱驛, 'Qiyanyan' 前言, in *Haiguo sishuo* 海國四說, T. Liang 梁廷楠, (annot.) Y. Luo 駱驛 and X. Liu 劉驍 (Beijing, 1997), pp. 2, 52.

²⁰ Liang 梁廷楠, *Haiguo sishuo* 海國四說, p. 70.

²¹ Y. Wei 魏源, *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志, vol. 59, *milijian zongji shang* 彌利堅總記上 (Pingqing, 1876), pp. 29–30.

²² The third edition of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* was entitled *Damei lianbang zhilüe* 大美聯邦志略.

²³ E. C. Bridgman, *Damei lianbang zhilüe* 大美聯邦志略 (Shanghai, 1861), p. 23.

Chinese-language history textbook entitled *Wanguo tongjian* 萬國通鑒 (A General History of the World), which was published in Shanghai in 1882.²⁴ Sheffield devoted a 26-page chapter to a discussion of the American Revolution, which incorporated more details than Bridgman's book did. An important change he made was that the British parliament became an object of condemnation. Sheffield explained the increase in taxes as the result of the resolutions passed by the parliament to pay for war debts. The British king remained a target of criticism, but he was criticised more for being selfish and indifferent to the colonies than for abusing his power to meddle in parliamentary affairs.²⁵ Another meaningful change was made to the presentation of the Declaration of Independence. Sheffield did not translate the entire declaration, but summarised its tenets in his own words: 'the state system should be in accordance with the will of the people; the people should have the power to formulate the law'.²⁶ The idea of equality, liberty, and inalienable rights, which are present in the third edition of Bridgman's book, are missing in Sheffield's narrative. However, the idea of popular sovereignty, which is absent in the first two editions of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* but included in the third edition, is present in Sheffield's book.

Both the third edition of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* and *A General History of the World* represent the American Revolution in a way that easily brings to mind the Whig interpretation in nineteenth-century America. They distinguish the American Revolution from the anti-tax rebellions in the history of imperial China. Sheffield's narrative implies that the increase in taxes was not an arbitrary decision made by the tyrant, although Chinese readers might not have been able to fully comprehend the relationship between the British king and parliament. Also, both books make it clear that British colonists, unlike rebels in imperial China, did not seek to replace the tyrant with a benevolent monarch. Nevertheless, all these new messages failed to reach Chinese readers. This failure was certainly not a result of the obscurity of the third edition of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* or *A General History of the World*, as both books were well known to those who were interested in foreign affairs. By the end of 1902, at least four editions of *A General History of the World* had been in circulation in China,²⁷ and an abstract of the third edition of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* was published in the twelfth issue of *Xiangxue xinbao* 湘學新報 (New Journal of Hunan Studies) in Changsha in 1897.²⁸ Liang Qichao, one of the most prominent scholars of the late Qing era, recommended both books in *Shiwu bao* 時務報 (Journal of Current Affairs) in 1896.²⁹

If both the third edition of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* and *A Brief Account of the United States of America* were well known among Chinese elites interested in foreign affairs, why were they still inclined to understand the American Revolution merely as an anti-tax movement or a rebellion against tyranny? A crucial factor is that

²⁴ For detailed bibliographic information on *A General History of the World*, see Z. Zou 鄒振環, 'Wanqing shishu bianzhuang tixi cong chuantong dao jindai de zhuanbian—yi hanyi xishi *Wanguo tongjian* he dongshi *Zhina tongshi*, *Dongyang shiyao* wei zhongxin' 晚清史書編撰體系從傳統到近代的轉變——以漢譯西史《萬國通鑒》和東史《支那同史》、《東洋史要》為中心, *Hebei Academic Journal* 河北學刊 30 (2010), pp. 2–3.

²⁵ D. Z. Sheffield, *Wanguo tongjian* 萬國通鑒, vol. 4 (1) (Shanghai, 1882), chapter 16, pp. 47–50.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁷ Zou, 'Wanqing shishu bianzhuang tixi', p. 2.

²⁸ 'Shixue shumu tiyao: Lianbang zhilue yi juan (yuankan ben: xixue dacheng ben)' 史學書目提要：聯邦志略一卷 (原刊本：西學大成本), *Xiangxue xinbao* 湘學新報 12 (11 July 1897), p. 30.

²⁹ Liang Qichao listed both books in *Xixue shumu biao* 西學書目表 (List of Books on Western learning), which was published in the *Journal of Current Affairs*. See Zou, 'Wanqing shishu bianzhuang tixi', p. 4; also note 72 in Pan, 'Meiguoduli xuanyan', p. 20.

they relied on Confucian concepts—their primary epistemic instrument to conceive of the world—to understand the American Revolution. The Confucian interpretation of the revolution, for most of them, was not a choice but the only option. The Confucian influence on Chinese elites' reading of the American Revolution was well documented by their own writings. Most revealing was Xu Jiyü's description of George Washington. In Xu's account, Washington's decision to pass on rulership to an elected ruler instead of his own son reflected a political principle developed in three ancient Chinese dynasties—*Tianxia wei-gong* 天下為公 (all under Heaven is for everyone).³⁰ The association that Xu constructed between Washington's decision and the political principle in ancient Chinese dynasties might easily remind us of the ideal ruler envisioned by eminent Confucian scholar Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695). According to Huang, an ideal ruler should learn from the sage king in Confucian classics—Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹—to act selflessly, take his subjects' interests and harm as his own, and refrain from occupying all under Heaven as his own private property.³¹

If we look at the writings of Liang Tingnan and Wei Yuan, we find that they shared the same Confucian ideal. Confucian political ideology viewed the ruler as the Son of Heaven who obtained the authority to govern all under Heaven (that is, sovereignty) from the Mandate of Heaven. While Confucianism demanded that subjects give nearly absolute obedience and loyalty to the ruler, it recognised the righteousness of rebellion against tyranny, because tyranny cost the ruler their source of political legitimacy—the Mandate of Heaven.³² Liang's and Wei's interpretations of the American Revolution fitted nearly seamlessly in Confucian ideology of political legitimacy. 'God' in Wei's narratives took up the role of Heaven in the Confucian text. He not only functioned as a source of sovereignty but also bestowed it on the ruler. Likewise, the American Revolution, which was recognised as a pursuit of inalienable rights in the American context, became a righteous rebellion against the ruler who lost the Mandate of God.

The Confucian reading of the American Revolution might sound odd for us today, but it was a natural one for Chinese elites in the nineteenth century. The Confucian lens filtered the alien elements of the American Revolution and transformed foreign figures and events into *déjà vu*. More importantly, the popularity of such a reading derived from its potential as material for the promotion of Confucianism. When the American Revolution was interpreted as a response to the tyranny of a ruler who had lost the Mandate of Heaven, it could be used as a foreign anecdote to urge the Qing emperors to implement benevolent rule; when George Washington was recast as a Western equivalent of the sage king, he was tamed as a Confucian moral paragon.

Prior to the turn of the nineteenth century, the Confucian reading of the American Revolution was dominant in China. It focused Chinese elites' attention on George Washington and persuaded them to follow Xu Jiyü in understanding Washington as a Western equivalent of the sage king in China.³³ We can clearly see this tendency in mathematician Li Shanlan's 李善蘭 (1810–1882) introduction to *Meriken shi* 米利堅志 (A History of the United States of America), a Japanese translation of George Payn

³⁰ *Liji* 禮記, (trans. and annot.) T. Yang 楊天宇 (Shanghai, 2016), p. 332.

³¹ Z. Huang 黃宗羲, *Mingyi daifang lu* 明夷待訪錄, in *Huang Zongxi quanji* 黃宗羲全集, vol. 1, (ed.) S. Shen 沈善洪 (Hangzhou, 1985), p. 2.

³² For Confucius's and Mencius's ideas of the Mandate of Heaven, see I. Miyazaki 宮崎市定, 'Chūgoku kodai ni okeru ten to mei to tenmei no shisō—Kōshi kara Mōshi ni itaru kakumei sishō no hatten' 中国古代における天と天命の思想—孔子から孟子に至る革命思想の発展, *Shirin* 史林 46 (1963), pp. 81–104; see also D. Zhao, *The Confucian-Legalist State: A New Theory of Chinese History* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 52–55.

³³ For a discussion of the representation of George Washington as an equivalent of a sage king, see Xiong, 'Huashengdun xingxiang', pp. 92–95; Pan, *Huashengdun shenhua*, pp. 35–41.

Quackenbos's (1826–1881) *Primary History of the United States* (1864).³⁴ The Japanese translation provided a far more detailed account of the American Revolution in Literary Sinitic than the third edition of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* and *A General History of the World* had done. Yet Li did not mention this at all. He devoted more than half of his introduction to praising Washington for exemplifying the sage king's qualities. In his eyes, Washington was comparable to Yao and Shun in China who chose their successors from virtuous men, rather than their own sons, so as to guard the principle that 'all under Heaven is for everyone'; in a similar fashion, Washington chose to retire from office after his two terms as the president of the United States of America so as to prevent the practice of lifetime appointment that would make all under Heaven the ruler's private property.³⁵

It is important to emphasise that Chinese elites' admiration for the American Revolution and its fruit—republicanism—did not mean that they wanted to pursue the same goal. On the contrary, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Confucian reading of the American Revolution went hand in hand with the conviction that republicanism was neither the best form of government nor a suitable polity for the Orient. Liang Tingnan admired America for its elected president, on the one hand, but, on the other, stressed that its polity was contingent upon 'the land', 'the time', and 'the people' of America. According to him, America was blessed with several advantages for independence: it was not initially occupied by the British and could not be effectively controlled due to its great distance from Britain; the resistance to taxation and British invasion was so urgent that there was no other possible option except revolution; and, since British colonists were stupid and ignorant and had no desire to elevate their social status, there was no conflict between federal states.³⁶ Nearly four decades later, Li Shanlan voiced a very similar opinion. Before concluding his introduction of *Meriken shi*, Li queried why Oka Senjin 岡千仞 (1833–1914) and Kōno Michiyuki 河野通之 (1842–1916) had decided to translate this book. He seemed to understand the translation as one among many efforts to reform Japan based on Western models, but he believed Japan did not need to abandon monarchy. He wrote,

I have heard that (the rulership over) Japan has been passed on within the same lineage without incurring the loss of virtues (by the rulers). If either succession by virtuous men or succession by descendants can maintain peace and stability, there is no need to stick to a single principle.³⁷

Both Liang Tingnan's and Li Shanlan's objection to the replacement of monarchy by republicanism was determined and sustained by their strong confidence in Chinese culture. It enabled them to admire American republicanism without viewing it as a superior polity. They could thus appropriate the American Revolution to promote Confucian ideology, on the one hand, while, on the other, rejecting the values it stood for. The Confucian appropriation of the American Revolution, however, became increasingly unviable after China's traumatic defeat by Japan in 1895 which substantially eroded Chinese elites' confidence in their own culture. It was under these circumstances that there was finally an

³⁴ Yan Qiujuan identified *The Primary History of the United States* as the original text of *Meriken shi*. See Q. Yan 閻秋君, 'Meiji shoki no nihon niokeru beikokushi no juyō nitsuite: Oka Senjin no *Meriken shi* o chūshinni' 明治初期の日本における米國史の受容について: 岡千仞の『米利堅志』を中心に, *Chūgoku bunka kenkyū to kyōiku* 中国文化: 研究と教育 77 (2019), pp. 2–3.

³⁵ S. Li 李善蘭, 'Milijian zhi xu' 米利堅志序, in Kakukenbosu 格堅勃斯 (George Payn Quackenbos), *Meriken shi* 米利堅志, (trans) S. Oka 岡千仞 and M. Kōno 河野通之 (Tokyo, 1873), pp. 2–3.

³⁶ Liang, *Haiguo sishuo*, pp. 50–51.

³⁷ Li, 'Milijian zhi xu', p. 3.

opportunity for the Chinese reading of the American Revolution to be updated. The essential resources for this update, as the following section will show, were provided by Japanese elites.

The discovery of the American Revolution in Japan

Before the start of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Japan had produced a large corpus of texts on the American Revolution, whose quantity far exceeded that produced in China. Yet the vast majority of these texts were published in the two decades preceding the war. An even more surprising fact is that some of the most widely read accounts of America in pre-1870s Japan actually came from China. The most influential among them was Wei Yuan's *The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*. First brought into Japan in 1851, the book immediately amazed its Japanese readers.³⁸ Due to an enormous demand for it, a total of 20 editions were published in Japan from 1854 to 1856, as well as an edition published in 1869.³⁹ None of these editions reproduced the entire book due to its gigantic scale. Publishers instead chose to reproduce several volumes of the original in each edition, which were often accompanied by Japanese annotations. The volumes on America were publishers' favourite, as they were incorporated in as many as six editions.⁴⁰ The great attention paid to *The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*, especially its volumes on America, stemmed from an urgent need to understand America, which suddenly emerged in 1852 when Matthew C. Perry (1794–1858) sailed across half of the earth to force the then isolated Japan to open its door. The desire to know their rivals grew even faster after Japan's isolation was ended. Japanese elites could no longer be satisfied by *The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms* and anxiously followed the paper trail provided by Wei's book to find other sources of information about America. As a result, all three editions of Bridgman's *A Brief Account of the United States of America* were brought into Japan, and the third edition alone was reprinted four times between 1861 and 1874.⁴¹

While Chinese sources constituted the essential materials for Japanese elites to understand America in the mid-nineteenth century, this started to change in the 1870s due to the opening up of Japan and, more importantly, Japanese elites' surging enthusiasm to reform their country with Western knowledge. Many Westerners came to Japan to seek

³⁸ Fifteen copies of the *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms* were brought into Japan between 1851 and 1854. O. Ōba 大庭脩, *Kanseki yunyū no bunkashi: Shōtoku taishi kara yoshimune he* 漢籍輸入の文化史：聖徳太子から吉宗へ (Tokyo, 1997), p. 326.

³⁹ Agawa Shūzō 阿川修三 lists 23 editions of the *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms* in an article published in 2010. In another article published in 2011, he amended the number of editions to 21 after removing one that was calculated twice and a pirated edition. For a list of the 23 editions of the *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*, see S. Agawa 阿川修三, 'Kaikoku zushi to nihon—Shionoya Seikō to Mitsukuri Genpo kuntenbon nitsuite' 『海国図志』と日本—塩谷世弘と箕作阮甫の訓点本について, *Bunkyo daigaku gengo to bunka* 文教大学言語と文化 23 (2010), pp. 7–9. For Agawa's correction, see S. Agawa 阿川修三, 'Kaikoku zushi to nihon sono ni—wakokubon, wakaihon no shomotsu toshite no keitai to sono shuppan ito ni tsuite' 阿川修三, 『海国図志』と日本 その2 —和刻本、和解本の書物としての形態とその出版意図について, *Bunkyo daigaku gengo to bunka* 文教大学言語と文化 24 (2011), p. 32. For bibliographical information about those editions of *Haiguo tuzhi*, see S. Ayusawa 鮎沢信太郎, 'Bakumatsu kaikokuki ni denrai shita tōhon sekai chirisho no honkoku to hōyaku' 幕末開国期に傳來した唐本世界地理書の翻刻と邦訳, in *Sakoku jidai Nihonjin no kaigai chishiki: sekai chiri, Seiyō shi ni kansuru bunken kaidai* 鎖国時代日本人の海外知識：鎖国時代の日本人の海外知識：世界地理、西洋史に関する文献解題, (ed.) Kaikoku Hyakunen Kinen Bunka Jigyōkai 開国百年記念文化事業会 (Tokyo, 1953), pp. 130–163.

⁴⁰ See also Agawa, 'Kaikoku zushi to nihon—Shionoya Seikō to Mitsukuri Genpo kuntenbon nitsuite', pp. 7–9.

⁴¹ K. Sakamoto 坂本恵子, 'Rēpō shiryaku o yomu' 『聯邦志略』を読む, *Nijima Kenkyū* 新島研究 110 (2019), pp. 124–128; T. Yoshida 吉田寅, *Chūgoku purotesutanto dendoshi kenkyū* 中国プロテスタント伝道師研究 (Tokyo, 1997), p. 378; N. Yoshikai 吉海直人, 'Rēpō shiryaku nitsuite' 『聯邦志略』について, *Sōgō bunka kenkyūjiyo kiyo* (Doshisha jyoshi daigaku) 総合文化研究所紀要(同志社女子大学) 15 (1998), p. 33.

business opportunities, preach their faith, advise the Meiji government, teach Japanese students, cure Japanese patients, or simply enjoy their adventure in a foreign land. At the same time, a large number of Japanese embarked on journeys to foreign lands where they would travel and study for months or years before returning to Japan. The rapidly increasing exchange between Japan and the West tremendously diversified the former's sources of information about America, leading to the almost immediate availability of many Japanese translations of Western books on America. These works were so widely circulated among Japanese elites that their tenets were incorporated into numerous textbooks used in educational institutions, ranging from universities to primary schools. Due to the great quantity of Japanese books that provided information about America, it is far beyond the scope of this article to attempt even an incomplete survey of them. Instead I believe it is more useful to focus my discussion on Japanese books that Chinese elites in Meiji Japan had access to.

One of the earliest Japanese books on America that Chinese elites in Meiji Japan could access was *Meriken shi*, a book briefly mentioned in the previous section. Its American original was brought into Japan by Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835–1901) and was the essential source on America for at least five Japanese history textbooks published in 1872 and 1873 alone. More than 20 years later, Chinese elites republished *Meriken shi* in Hunan province.⁴² A comparison between the discussion of the American Revolution in this book and that in previously discussed Chinese works reveals many similarities between them. First, like the third edition of *A Brief Account of the United States of America* and *A General History of the World*, the two translators of *Meriken shi*—Oka Senjin and Kōno Michiyuki—did not blame the tax increase solely on the British king, but described it as a collective decision, after deliberation, made by the king and the British parliament.⁴³ Second, Oka and Kōno explicitly expressed the idea of inalienable rights in their translation of the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence: 'What is bestowed to me by Heaven cannot be abandoned by myself or taken away by others. This is the right of self-determination and independence. The ruler makes decrees and establishes laws to protect everyone.'⁴⁴ Third, Oka and Kōno, like their Chinese counterparts in the nineteenth century, interpreted George Washington as a Western equivalent of the sage king in Confucian classics. In the concluding remarks at the end of their book, they argued that Washington, like Yao and Shun in ancient China, behaved in accordance with the will of Heaven and the people.⁴⁵

It is not difficult to understand the first and third similarities. Oka and Kōno's description of the British parliament's significant role in increasing taxes was a loyal reproduction of the messages in the American original.⁴⁶ Their interpretation of George Washington as a Western version of the Confucian sage king was probably because they were both Sinologists with solid training in Confucian classics. Yet the second similarity is intriguing. Perhaps because George Payn Quackenbos intended his book to be used in primary schools and thus wanted to introduce the American Revolution in easily comprehensible terms, he did not elaborate further on the Declaration of Independence, simply stating that '(revolutionaries) said the king should rule over them no more'.⁴⁷ However, the content of the declaration, which was absent in the American original,

⁴² Yu, 'Meiguo dulishi', p. 62.

⁴³ Kakukubos, *Meriken shi*, vol. 2, p. 19; G. P. Quackenbos, *Primary History of the United States* (New York, 1860), pp. 85–91.

⁴⁴ Kakukubos, *Meriken shi*, vol. 2, p. 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 27.

⁴⁶ For the discussion of the role of the British parliament in increasing taxes on America, see Quackenbos, *Primary History of the United States*, pp. 85–91.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

was present in the Japanese translation. Oka and Kōno probably borrowed from the third edition of *A Brief Account of the United States of America*, which they consulted to add necessary information to their translation.⁴⁸ More substantial evidence can be found in the striking resemblance between Oka and Kōno's and Bridgman's translations of the concept of inalienable rights: the former translated the concept as '己不得棄, 人不得奪' while the latter translated it as '我不得棄, 人不得奪'.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, it is important to note that Oka and Kōno's translation did not include Bridgman's description of the principle of popular sovereignty. The revolution was not justified as the righteous action of the people who possessed sovereignty, but was interpreted as a rebellion against the king's tyranny.⁵⁰ The omission of the principle of popular sovereignty is less likely to have been a mistake than a deliberate choice made by Oka and Kōno. We can better understand this issue by looking at the gaps between the three introductions of *Meriken shi*, each of which was authored by a Chinese or Japanese scholar. As we have seen in the previous section, Li Shanlan admired George Washington as a Western equivalent of the sage king, but discouraged Japanese elites from adopting republicanism. Li's opinion was shared by Sinologist Kawada Ōkō 川田鸞江 (1830–1896) in his introduction to the same book. According to Kawada, Japan should not blindly imitate America because the Japanese state was established in a very different way from the American one. The purpose of the book, for Kawada, was not to promote values endorsed by American revolutionaries, but to help Japanese readers understand how different America and Japan were and how impossible it was to transplant American institutions to Japan.⁵¹

In contrast, Nakamura Keiu 中村敬字 (1832–1891) tossed out an opposite view in the introduction he wrote for *Meriken shi*. Nakamura started his introduction with a prophecy made by a Greek philosopher 2,000 years ago. According to the philosopher, all the states would be unified into one in the future and people would enjoy their lives, see each other as compatriots from the same native places, and be governed by the law. Nakamura admired the Greek philosopher's ideal of great unity, which he believed would eliminate the source of conflict between humans—monarchs who were eager to conquer each other. Nakamura then argued that the independence of America and the Meiji Restoration were both harbingers for the realisation of the Greek philosopher's prophecy. In his eyes, America had eradicated social hierarchy and hereditary rulership and allowed the people to establish laws; people in reformed Japan had set aside their conflict and became united. He even went so far as to urge all the states to eliminate national boundaries and establish a general parliament to govern all the people on earth.⁵² Nakamura's understanding of the independence of America and the reform of Japan as steps in the progress towards the great unity of the human race was no less problematic than Li's and Kawada's interpretations. Yet Nakamura clearly better identified with, if not better understood, the ideas of equality, liberty, inalienable rights, and popular sovereignty than the other two scholars.

The similarity between Li and Kawada as well as their difference from Nakamura need to be understood within their own milieus. Back in 1874, China was in recovery from the Taiping (1850–1864) and Nian (1851–1868) rebellions and had implemented a series of reforms to import Western technology. Li, therefore, had every reason to feel optimistic

⁴⁸ S. Oka 岡千仞, 'Reigen' 例言, in Kakukenbosu, *Meriken shi*, vol. 1.

⁴⁹ Bridgman, *Damei lianbang zhilüe*, p. 23; Kakukenbosu, *Meriken shi*, vol. 2, p. 20.

⁵⁰ Kakukenbosu, *Meriken shi*, vol. 2, p. 20.

⁵¹ Ōkō Kawada Takeshi 鸞江川田剛 (Ō. Kawada 川田鸞江), 'Meriken shi jyo' 米利堅志序, in Kakukenbosu, *Meriken shi*, vol. 1, pp. 2–3.

⁵² Keiu Nakamura Masanao 敬字中村正直 (M. Nakamura 中村正直), 'Meriken shi jyo' 米利堅志序, in Kakukenbosu, *Meriken shi*, vol. 1, p. 3.

about China's revitalisation and maintain confidence in monarchy. Kawada was faced with a different reality in Japan, which, nevertheless, also nurtured his belief in monarchy. In 1868 elites from southern Japan overthrew the Tokugawa Bakufu, which was considered incapable of protecting Japan from foreign imperialism. With the slogan 'Sonnō jōi' 尊王攘夷 (Revere the emperor, expel the barbarians), southern elites installed the Meiji emperor as the sovereign monarch under their control. The Confucian idea of emperor, which served as a remedy for Japan's crisis in the anti-Bakufu movement, naturally alienated Sinologists like Kawada from an American polity that had rejected monarchy.

Nakamura's passionate embrace of the American Revolution was, in contrast, structured by a growing fascination with Western ideas of equality, liberty, civil rights, and popular sovereignty, which were disseminated through a series of petitions and rebellions known as *Jiyū minken ūdo* 自由民権運動 (Liberty and Civil Rights Movement). Both Nakamura's interest in Western political ideas and the emergence of the Liberty and Civil Rights Movement responded to a series of aggressive state-building reforms launched by the newly established Meiji government. These reforms significantly violated the interest of three groups: 1) the elites who were marginalised in the Meiji government by their peers from southern Japan, 2) former samurai who were impoverished by the abolishment of the status system, and 3) small landowners and tenant peasants in the countryside who were stripped off their rights to common land, burdened by a newly established fixed land tax, and forced to comply with conscription and compulsory education.⁵³ Despite the gulf between their backgrounds, the three groups all attributed their misery to what they considered the oligarchic rule of southern elites and viewed the ideas of equality, liberty, civil rights, and popular sovereignty as weapons to protect their interests.⁵⁴ They thus protested or rebelled to pressure the government into establishing a constitution and a parliament. The rise of the movement drew activists' attention to foreign revolutions that were recognised as the pursuit of liberty and civil rights, especially the Glorious Revolution in Britain, the French Revolution, and the American Revolution. Among the three foreign revolutions, the American Revolution was most admired by activists in the Liberty and Civil Rights Movement.⁵⁵ One reason, as Tadashi Aruga argues, is that the American Revolution presented a more progressive pursuit of liberty and civil rights than did the English Revolution, but was not marred by 'the excess of the Terror' and 'the ultimate defeat' in the French Revolution.⁵⁶ Another likely reason why activists in Japan sympathised more with the American Revolution is that they confronted Western imperialism in the late nineteenth century just as American revolutionaries were repressed by Britain. The rapidly rising demand for liberty and civil rights diverted activists in the Liberty and Civil Rights Movement, such as Nakamura, away from the Confucian reading of the American Revolution. They took a fresh look at the American Revolution, ultimately embracing the Whig interpretation ignored by their predecessors.

If we compare Oka and Kōno with the authors of the three introductions to *Meriken shi*, we can clearly understand the two translators' struggle. Like Nakamura, they were probably not unaffected by the ideas of liberty and rights, which started to disseminate in Japan in response to the emergence of the Meiji oligarchy. Their sympathy with

⁵³ A. Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 87–93. For a general history of the movement, see M. Inada 稲田雅洋, *Jiyū minken undo no keipu: kindai nihon no genron no chikara* 自由民権運動の系譜: 近代日本の言論の力 (Tokyo, 2009).

⁵⁴ For the oligarchic rule of the Meiji government, see T. Ikai 猪飼隆明, 'Meiji Ishin to yūshi sensei no seiritsu' 明治維新と有司専制の成立, *Machikaneyama ronsō* 待兼山論叢 39 (2005), pp. 1–25.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of Japanese activists' embrace of the American Revolution, see T. Aruga, 'The Declaration of Independence in Japan: translation and transplantation, 1854–1997', *The Journal of American History* 85 (1999), pp. 1416–1417.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1417.

Western ideas perhaps motivated them to add Bridgman's translation of the Declaration of Independence to their own book. Yet neither Oka nor Kōno was as passionate about liberty and rights as Nakamura, who was the paramount pioneer in the Liberty and Civil Rights Movement. Their education and career as sinologists, which tied them to the Confucian ideal of emperorship, alienated them from any ideas that denied the legitimacy of monarchy. As a result, the two translators omitted the part in the Declaration of Independence that rejected a sovereign monarch. Despite that, if we stretch our comparison further to look at Wei Yuan, Xu Jiyü, and Liang Tingnan, it is clear that *Meriken shi* was a harbinger of the rise of a new interpretation of the American Revolution that was absent in previous Chinese discourses. Even though the Japanese translation was still affected by Confucian ideology, its authors displayed more interest in the ideas of liberty and rights than their Chinese predecessors. Their stance was closer to the Whig interpretation of the American Revolution adopted by the third edition of *A Brief Account of the United States* and *A General History of the World*, though the latter two books failed to arouse their Chinese readers' interest in liberty and rights during most of the nineteenth century.

The gaps between the interpretation of the American Revolution in *Meriken shi* and earlier Chinese interpretations of the revolution were soon widened in the following two decades. In their struggle with the Meiji oligarchs, activists in the Liberty and Civil Rights Movement took pains to make liberty and civil rights—the ideas closely tied to the American Revolution in the Whig interpretation—household concepts. We can trace this change by looking at three Japanese books, which served as the essential materials for a Chinese-language article on the American Revolution which will be examined in the following section.

Among the three books, *Taisei kakumei shikan* 泰西革命史鑑 (A History of Revolutions in the West) (1885) provided the most comprehensive account of the American Revolution. Its author Hisamatsu Yoshinori 久松義典 (1855–1905) was a scholar and politician who sympathised with the Liberty and Civil Rights Movement. Hisamatsu divided his book into three volumes, each devoted to what he called a revolution—one that collapsed the Roman Republic, one that eliminated absolute monarchy in Britain, and one that established the United States of America. Like *Meriken shi*, this book was essentially a translation, but it surveyed a far greater number of Western sources.⁵⁷ The advantage brought by the availability of new sources enabled Hisamatsu's representation of the American Revolution to differ qualitatively from its predecessors. The most visible difference lay in the new terms Hisamatsu utilised to translate core concepts tied to the American Revolution. He replaced earlier translations, which basically appropriated Chinese political practices or Confucian traditions, with new terms that continue to be used today in both China and Japan. Colony, liberty, rights, and civil rights were translated into *shokuminchi* 植民地, *jiyū* 自由, *kenri* 權利, and *minken* 民權, respectively.⁵⁸ None of those terms were Hisamatsu's own innovations, as they had been popularised by activists in the Liberty and Civil Rights Movement in the 1870s. I foreground them because they enabled Hisamatsu to provide a new interpretation of the American Revolution which is already implied in Hisamatsu's foreword to his book wherein he confessed his intention to introduce all the figures and incidents related to 'the expansion and shrinking of liberty and rights'.⁵⁹ Hisamatsu then deployed the main text to recast the American Revolution as a sublime pursuit of liberty and civil rights. Like his predecessors, he attributed the outbreak of the revolution to taxes imposed on British colonists in North America. Yet he cited Samuel Adams (1722–1803) and James Otis Jr. (1725–1783) to condemn British

⁵⁷ Y. Hisamatsu 久松義典, 'Reigen' 例言, in *Taisei kakumei shikan* 泰西革命史鑑, vol. 1 (Tokyo, 1885), p. 1.

⁵⁸ For the usage of *shokuminchi*, *jiyū*, *kenri*, *minken*, see *ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 5, 9.

⁵⁹ Hisamatsu, 'Reigen', p. 1.

taxation as a scheme to impose restrictions on British colonists' 'liberty' and 'rights'.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, he no longer considered the British repression of colonists in North America as a result of George III's abuse of power, although he still condemned the king. He instead focused his criticism on the British parliament, which was described as the key actor in taxing and repressing British colonists in North America. By citing multiple figures, he reminded readers that colonists rejected the increase in taxes with the slogan 'No taxation without representation'.⁶¹ The same tendency can be detected in Hisamatsu's description of the Declaration of Independence. Even though he did not provide a translation of the document, he summarised its core messages—inalienable liberty and natural rights. He wrote, 'the common principle of Heaven and Earth and the justice of human race were the basis of the source of liberty and rights'.⁶²

The second book was *Washinton* 華聖頓 (Washington) (1900), a biography of George Washington that Fukuyama Yoshiharu 福山義春 wrote using materials from six Western works.⁶³ Fukuyama displayed greater enthusiasm in his praise for Washington than his Chinese and Japanese predecessors. Borrowing the words of a critic, he described Washington as 'the only person, apart from sages, in the three thousand years that was close to perfection'.⁶⁴ Thanks to the length of the biography—162 pages—he managed to include many anecdotes and details to exemplify Washington's numerous virtues. Among the virtues he mentioned was selflessness, which had been singled out by earlier Chinese and Japanese elites. Yet Fukuyama no longer represented Washington as a Western equivalent of the selfless sage king in Confucian classics. Instead, he depicted him as a fighter for liberty and civil rights and interpreted his selflessness as sacrificing for liberty, justice, the nation, the state, and, ultimately, the entire human race.⁶⁵ Equally noteworthy was Fukuyama's translation of the Declaration of Independence. He translated the second paragraph as follows:

It does not need evidence from us to recognize that all people are equal. They hold rights that cannot be given to others and are granted by nature. Life, liberty, and happiness are all part of these rights. In order to secure the safety of these rights, people set up the government and granted part of their rights to it so as to allow it to govern. If the government fails this purpose, condemns people's rights, abuses its borrowed rights, and pushes people's life, liberty and happiness into danger, it is very appropriate to establish a new government.⁶⁶

It is not hard to see that Fukuyama confused power with rights when he stated that 'this government...abuses its borrowed rights'. Despite that, his translation is obviously the closest to the American original among all the works discussed so far. The ideas of universal equality, liberty, inalienable rights, and popular sovereignty were all presented in a way nearly identical to the original text.

The last book was *Sekai kinseishi* 世界近世史 (A History of the Modern World) authored by Matsudaira Yasukuni 松平康國 (1863–1945) and published in 1901 when Matsudaira was teaching history and sinology at Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō 東京専門学校 (Tokyo Vocational College, now Waseda University). As the book was a general history of the world, Matsudaira could only devote a chapter—18 pages—to the American Revolution.

⁶⁰ Hisamatsu, *Taisei kakumei shikan*, vol. 3, p. 7, 19.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10, p. 25.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶³ Y. Fukuyama 福山義春, 'Hanrei' 凡例, in *Washinton* 華聖頓 (Tokyo, 1900), p. 4.

⁶⁴ Fukuyama 福山義春, 'Jyo' 序, in *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 162.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.

It is clear that he shared with Hisamatsu and Fukuyama the same idea that the American Revolution was a pursuit of liberty and rights. He quoted James Otis Jr.'s claim—no taxation without representation—and located the root of the American Revolution in British taxation, which he believed motivated British colonists to ponder over their rights and care about politics.⁶⁷ Yet Matsudaira went further than Hisamatsu and Fukuyama to position the American Revolution in a global context. In the introduction of his book, he listed four features that characterised the early modern world—the separation of state and religion, the balance of power in international relations, the advancement of liberty, and the eastward expansion of colonialism. While he did not spell it out, we can infer from his subsequent narrative that he thought of the American Revolution as a pioneer in the global pursuit of liberty.⁶⁸

The three books distinguish themselves from both *Meriken shi* and many earlier Chinese discourses on the American Revolution in several ways. First, they emancipated the American Revolution from the Confucian framework. Second, they were aligned with the accounts of Bridgman and Sheffield in their efforts to re-establish the ties between the American Revolution and the ideas of liberty, rights, and popular sovereignty. According to them, what British colonists in North America fought against were not only the king, but also British elites represented by the parliament. The revolution thus became a political community's fight for its members' inalienable rights—life, liberty and happiness—that were repressed by another political community.

These changes were doubtlessly enabled by the abundant sources available to the three Japanese authors. Yet just as their predecessors, influenced by Confucianism, tended to see the American Revolution through a Confucian lens, their representations of the American Revolution were shaped by their own values and political views. When Oka and Kōno published *Meriken shi* in 1873, various Western-type reforms had been implemented for several years already but were still far from completion. Accordingly, Western learning started to challenge the orthodox status of Chinese learning, but was not yet able to replace it. Therefore, the lingering influence of Confucianism still affected their decisions to localise the American Revolution. In contrast, the following two decades witnessed not only the expansion of Western-style reforms, but also the dissemination of the ideas of liberty, civil rights, and popular sovereignty through the Liberty and Civil Rights Movement. When Hisamatsu published his book in 1885, he had already developed the belief that the pursuit of liberty, civil rights, and popular sovereignty was a universal and inevitable trend. In the last six pages of his third volume, he criticised conservatives who believed such trends were not compatible with Japanese traditions and would thus undermine people's reverence for the emperor and their love for the state. He ridiculed these conservatives for their rejection of these universal trends, which for him was equivalent to 'covering their ears while stealing bells'.⁶⁹ When Fukuyama and Matsudaira published their books in the early 1900s, the Liberty and Civil Rights Movement had introduced the core ideas promoted by American revolutionaries to nearly every single Japanese elite. More importantly, Western-style reforms had been ongoing for more than three decades and had already strengthened Japan so much so that it was able to defeat China in 1895. Owing to the achievements of the reform and Japan's military victory, which solidified the authority of the West in the minds of Japanese elites, Western value and ideologies started to be accepted as universal. It is within this context that the ideas of liberty, civil rights, and popular sovereignty, which had been marginalised in the Confucian reading of the American Revolution, regained their position in the

⁶⁷ Y. Matsudaira 松平康國, *Sekai kinseishi* 世界近世史 (Tokyo, 1901), pp. 329–330.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–13.

⁶⁹ Hisamatsu, *Taisei kakumei shikan*, vol. 3, pp. 108–113.

new Japanese interpretation of the American Revolution that resembled the Whig historiography of nineteenth-century America.

It is, however, wrong to presume that the consolidation of Western authority in Japan mobilised the three Japanese authors to advocate a revolution or the transplantation of American republicanism to Japan. Fukuyama and Matsudaira eschewed any possible association of the American Revolution with Japan. Hisamatsu did try to establish the relevance of the American Revolution for Japan, but his intention was to disseminate liberal ideas so as to pressure the Meiji government to establish a constitution and a parliament. Their attitudes can be better understood if we entertain the fact that the monarchy was accepted as the foundation of a new Japan by both liberals and conservatives during the Meiji era. Neither group was concerned by possible despotism, most likely because there were few powerful emperors in Japanese history, let alone absolute monarchs. More importantly, the anti-Bakufu movement was launched in the name of the emperor, thus transforming him into a saviour of Japan who had removed the incompetent shōgun. As a result, neither conservatives in the Meiji government nor their liberal critics opposed the monarchy. Many of them shared the same premise that Japan should adopt a constitutional monarchy. Their differences lay primarily in their views of the equilibrium between state power (or imperial authority) and individual rights within the framework of constitutional monarchy. Therefore, regardless of the fact that the three Japanese authors acknowledged liberty, civil rights, and popular sovereignty as universal, they never wanted to break away from imperial rule.

The discovery of the American Revolution by Chinese elites in Japan

How did Chinese revolutionaries in Japan understand Japanese discourses on the American Revolution? Would they still ignore its messages about liberty, civil rights, and popular sovereignty as their predecessors had done in the nineteenth century? A Chinese-language monthly journal entitled *Youxue Yibian* 遊學譯編 (Study Abroad and Compilation of Translations) can help us find answers to these two questions. The journal was edited by Chinese students who came to study in Japan after 1895 and was published from November 1902 to November 1903. As its title suggests, the journal primarily published translations—often excerpted translations—of Japanese books. Although it was published in Japan, its primary target were readers in China. According to the editorials in the inaugural issue, the journal was committed to introducing new knowledge to its readers in China.⁷⁰ The journal's focus on domestic readers was also affirmed by its extensive distribution network in China, which was composed of 39 sales agencies in 11 provinces.⁷¹

In its first, second, and third issues, *Youxue Yibian* serialised an article entitled 'Ziyou shengchan guo shengchan ri lüeshu' 自由生產國生產日畧述 (The Day of Producing Liberty in the State that Produces Liberty), which was based on the aforementioned three books by Hisamatsu, Fukuyama, and Matsudaira. The anonymous Chinese contributor abandoned earlier Chinese terms adopted by both American missionaries (Bridgman and Sheffield) and Chinese scholars (Wei Yuan, Xu Jiyü, and Liang Tingnan) to discuss the American Revolution. Instead, the contributor adopted compound words used by Hisamatsu, Fukuyama, and Matsudaira to translate colony, liberty, rights, and civil rights as *zhimindi* 殖民地, *ziyou* 自由, *quanli* 權利, and *minquan* 民權, respectively. The contributor also followed the three Japanese authors in interpreting the American Revolution as the pursuit of freedom and imbued the entire article with what can be seen as an obsession with liberty. The entire opening section was devoted to a discussion of its value.

⁷⁰ D. Yang 楊度, 'Youxue yibian xu' 遊學譯編敘, *Youxue yibian* 遊學譯編 11 (1903), p. 3.

⁷¹ 'Benbian daipaisuo' 本編代派所, *Youxue yibian* 遊學譯編 11 (1903).

Citing a historian, the contributor argued that the advancement of civilisation depended on the development of three ideas—liberty, progress, and the unification of human race—and that liberty affected both racial progress and human unification. The contributor also cited Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770–1831) *Lectures on Philosophy of History*, stating that the advancement of the idea of liberty was the purpose of history and the study of such advancement was the principle of the philosophy of history.⁷²

After lavishing praise on the idea of liberty, the contributor took great care to weave it into the narrative of the American Revolution. The contributor termed British colonialists 'ziyoumin' 自由民 (people of liberty) who were born with a love for liberty and risked their lives to seek religious freedom across the Atlantic Ocean.⁷³ The contributor followed the three Japanese scholars in interpreting significant events and figures in the American Revolution. The tax increase was described as a decision made by the British parliament; British colonists' resistance to taxation was justified as a righteous action with the slogan 'No taxation without representation';⁷⁴ George Washington was no longer portrayed as a Confucian sage king, but defined as a hero who was created out of the people of liberty.⁷⁵ The contributor, just like the three Japanese scholars, also looked beyond the issue of taxation to search for the causes of the American Revolution. The fundamental reason, according to them, was that the British government, in order to control colonies and grab all the profits obtained from them, denied '(British colonists the) permanent right to self-government'. British repression eventually infuriated 'the people of liberty' and wakened their 'spirit of liberty and republicanism'.⁷⁶ The contributor then demonstrated the indignation of the people of liberty through a loyal translation of Fukuyama's translation of the Declaration of Independence and Hisamatsu's summary of the same document.⁷⁷

Why did the Chinese contributor loyally adopt Japanese scholars' interpretation of the American Revolution, instead of following the Chinese predecessors who had ignored the Whig interpretation presented by Bridgman and Sheffield? Such a decision was likely to have been shaped by a new perception of China in relation to Western powers. During the long nineteenth century, China had been defeated by Britain and France in three wars. However, as Li Shanlan's doubt about American democracy showed, none of those defeats destroyed Chinese elites' confidence in their own culture. They believed Qing China fell behind the West only in military terms and that the gap could be bridged by importing Western technology to build a strong army. Even though many scholars in the twentieth century often ridiculed this perception as arrogant and ignorant, it was not completely unreasonable. Before its war with Britain and France in the mid-nineteenth century, Qing China had been a regional hegemon for nearly 200 years. Also, what Britain and France defeated was not the empire during its heyday, but a state that had been exhausted, split, and paralysed by the Taiping and Nian rebellions. The casualties and destruction brought about by the wars against Western powers were also dwarfed by those incurred by internal rebellions. Therefore, China's defeat in wars against Britain and France could be easily interpreted as occasional setbacks rather than proof of China's inferiority. More importantly, during the three decades preceding the war, China had rapidly built giant navies, Western-style armies, arsenals, shipyards, mining companies, and textile mills through the *Ziqiang yundong* 自強運動 (Self-Strengthening

⁷² 'ziyou shengchan guo shengchan ri lüeshu' 自由生產國生產日畧述, *Youxue yibian* 遊學譯編 1 (1902), p. 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

⁷⁷ 'ziyou shengchan guo shengchan ri lüeshu' 自由生產國生產日畧述, *Youxue yibian* 遊學譯編3 (1902), p. 21.

Movement). Without the benefit of hindsight, for any contemporary, those achievements seemed to indicate the recovery of Qing China.

Chinese elites' confidence in their own culture was, however, eroded by the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). Until the late stage of the war, they had little concern about the possibility of defeat and were eager to teach their Japanese counterparts a lesson.⁷⁸ Optimism about China's victory was followed by Qing China's traumatic defeat. Chinese elites were traumatised because the empire was defeated by what they had disdained as 'zui'er xiaoguo' 蕞爾小國 (a tiny state). Overwhelmed by both shock and humiliation, Chinese elites started to critically reflect on the war. As several recent studies have reminded us, China's defeat cannot be attributed to its backward weaponry, as there was no significant difference between the equipment of Chinese troops and that of Japanese troops.⁷⁹ The result of the war was instead shaped by a wide range of factors: China was less prepared for the war than Japan; Chinese troops lacked training and drill; Chinese soldiers were outnumbered by their Japanese counterparts in key battles on the land; and the Beiyang fleet was left alone to fight the Japanese and lacked enough explosive shells due to serious corruption within the fleets.⁸⁰ However, when Chinese elites reflected on the war, they overlooked the complexity of Japan's victory and believed that Japan had surpassed China before the war owing to its successful reform. The postwar reflection led to two important conclusions. First, despite all the achievements of the Self-Strengthening Movement, Chinese elites viewed it as a failure due to its inability to strengthen China. Second, some Chinese elites started to believe the Self-Strengthening reform had failed because it was not comprehensive like the Meiji Restoration. The two conclusions consequently resulted in the internalisation of the ideology that West was superior to China not only in its military capability, but also in its culture which in turn created its military advantage.

While the ideology of Western superiority reached its heyday in the 1910s, it was already displaying its power in the 1900s. First, in the face of the Western challenge, Confucianism, which had dictated Chinese elites' understanding of the American Revolution during most of the nineteenth century, lost its authority as the single frame of interpretation for foreign events and figures. Relieved of the burden to fit foreign history into Confucian ideology, Chinese elites were allowed to seek a new interpretation of the American Revolution. More importantly, viewing the West as a superior civilisation, Chinese elites believed that importing Western science and technology alone could not strengthen China. They rather hoped to adopt Western political systems which, by the end of the nineteenth century, had been tied closely to political ideals of liberty, civil rights, equality, and popular sovereignty. The desire for political reforms based on Western models motivated Chinese elites to study the Western political experience, thus creating an opportunity for them to renew their understanding of the American Revolution—a milestone in the development of Western polities. Under such circumstances, they started to adopt the Whig interpretation of the American Revolution,

⁷⁸ G. Yi 易耕, 'Jiawu zhanzheng zhong Shenbao dui qingjun de taidu zhuanbian 甲午戰爭中《申報》對清軍的態度轉變', *Xinwen Chunqiu 新聞春秋* 4 (2014), pp. 9–11.

⁷⁹ A. Fung, 'Testing the Self-Strengthening: the Chinese Army in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895', *Modern Asian Studies* 40 (1996), p. 1017; J. L. Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839–1895* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 163–169.

⁸⁰ B. A. Elman, 'Naval warfare and the refraction of China's Self-Strengthening reforms into scientific and technological failure, 1865–1895', *Modern Asian Studies* 38 (2004), pp. 319–20; see also T. Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation and the Rise of the West in World History* (Princeton, 2016), pp. 285–296. For a discussion of the lack of military training, see R. J. Smith, 'The reform of military education in late Ch'ing China, 1842–1895', *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18 (1978), pp. 15–40; Fung, 'Testing the Self-Strengthening', pp. 1010–1014, 1017, 1022–1026.

which was already present in earlier Chinese texts produced by Bridgman and Sheffield but ignored by their predecessors.

The renewed understanding of the American Revolution among Chinese elites enabled the American movement to find a new mission. It functioned as a foreign precedent that lent Western authority to revolutionary elites, helping them to justify and propagate their anti-Manchu leanings. In 1903 Chen Tianhua 陳天華 (1875–1905) called upon his readers to learn from America's decision to seek independence from Britain in his famed pamphlet *Menghui tou* 猛回頭 (A Sudden Look Back).⁸¹ In 1911 Lu Xin 盧信 (1885–1933) urged Han Chinese revolutionaries to overthrow their Manchu rulers who, he claimed, treated them worse than the British had treated the colonists in North America. He advocated establishing a Chinese constitution based on the model set by the American constitution.⁸² The list of texts that exploited the aura of the American Revolution to propagate an anti-Manchu movement could go on, but is too long-winded a discussion for this article. I instead narrow down my discussion to two cases.

The first case is that of Zou Rong's 鄒容 (1885–1905) pamphlet *Geming jun* 革命軍 (Revolutionary Army), one of the most widely read revolutionary texts in the 1900s. Zou, a native of Sichuan province, came to Tokyo as a student in 1902, but was expelled the following year for his collaboration with Zhang Ji 張繼 (1882–1947) and Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) to cut the queue of a Qing official in Tokyo. After returning from Japan, Zou actively propagated an anti-Manchu revolution in Shanghai. He was arrested in July 1903 soon after he published *Revolutionary Army*. In his provocative pamphlet, Zou frequently referenced figures and events in the American Revolution. He promoted George Washington, along with Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), as exemplars for Han Chinese revolutionaries.⁸³ At the beginning of his brochure, Zou expressed his wish that 'the descendants of the Yellow Emperor all become George Washington'.⁸⁴ The American Revolution, along with the Glorious Revolution of Britain and the French Revolution, were praised as 'revolutions in the world that resonated to (the will of) Heaven and (that of) humans'.⁸⁵ These revolutions, in Zou's eyes, eliminated corruption and preserved conscience, developed barbarity into civility, and turned slaves into masters.⁸⁶ At the end of his brochure, Zou even proposed remodelling China according to the American polity:

The Chinese constitution should be established according to the American constitution and Chinese conditions; Chinese self-government laws should be established in accordance with American self-government laws; affairs concerning individuals, diplomacy, and the organization of state should all be determined according to the American precedents.⁸⁷

Anyone who read *Revolutionary Army* would hardly remain unimpressed by the flattering images of the American Revolution and British colonists in North America, which would probably embarrass Americans today. In Zou's narrative, every single nation in the world should naturally follow in the footsteps of Americans, who were supposed to be universal

⁸¹ T. Chen 陳天華, 'Menghui tou' 猛回頭, *Chen Tianhua Ji* 陳天華集 (Shanghai, 1928), p. 92.

⁸² X. Lu 盧信, 'Geming zhenli—jingao Zhongguo ren' 革命真理—敬告中國人, in *Xinhai geming shi ziliao xinbian* 辛亥革命史資料新編, (eds) K. Zhang 章開沅, F. Luo 羅福惠 and C. Yan 嚴昌洪 (Wuhan, 2006), p. 7, p. 15.

⁸³ R. Zou 鄒容, *Geming jun* 革命軍, in *Xinhai geming qianshinian shilun xuanji* 辛亥革命前十年時論選集, (eds) Z. Zhang 張枏 and R. Wang 王忍之, vol. 1 (Beijing, 1960), p. 653.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 651.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 652.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 676.

exemplars for the entire human race. Yet it remains unclear how Zou came to identify the American Revolution as a model for China. Like most Chinese elites in the twentieth century, Zou was ambiguous about the so-called American inspiration for the anti-Manchu movement.

Henan 河南, a Chinese-language journal published by Chinese students in Japan from December 1906 to December 1907, offers us a rare insight into the otherwise ambiguous link between the American Revolution and the anti-Manchu movement. The journal, like *Youxue Yibian*, primarily targeted domestic readers and was intended by its editors to be a source of new knowledge for China. Its ninth issue published an intriguing article comparing the American Revolution with the anti-Manchu revolution in China. The author, who wrote under the pseudonym Nanxia 南俠, first surveyed several forms of political organisation to demonstrate that the American system was the best option for China. Socialism, according to the author, was excellent but impossible to achieve in China due to the lack of financial resources and industrialisation. British and Japanese systems were rejected for the reason that their monarchs wielded great power and were not suitable for a country like China which had been afflicted by despotism for centuries. The author also dismissed French and German politics on the grounds that they merely brought about a change of king rather than a clean break with monarchy.

After eliminating all other options, Nanxia claimed that an American-style revolution was the only choice because there was a striking resemblance between Qing China and British America, and between Han Chinese under Manchu rule and British colonists repressed by the British king and parliament. The author then listed several factors that were believed to make it easier for Han Chinese revolutionaries to eradicate colonialism than their counterparts across the Pacific Ocean. First, Manchu control over the Han Chinese was not as tight as British control over the Americans. Second, China had already restored some control over its mines and railways, while the political circle of the 13 colonies in North America had been under the constant influence of Britain and France. Third, the Han Chinese were always united against their common enemies. Fourth, the Han Chinese were blessed with many geographical barriers to defend themselves against colonialism. Fifth, the Han Chinese had dominated schools which were only under the nominal control of the Qing court. Sixth, the Qing troops stationed in empire-wide garrisons were about to be removed and the Han Chinese had risen to power in the military. Seventh, the natural resources of China proper could rival those of the 13 colonies in North America.⁸⁸

After comparing Qing China's situation with that of America, Nanxia argued that now was the best time for the Han Chinese to revolt in the same way that British colonists had done 150 years ago. On the one hand, Manchu repression was intensifying, just as British repression had done in the mid-eighteenth century: the Qing court had not only imposed heavier taxes on the Han Chinese, but also repressed the efforts of the Han Chinese to resist Western imperialism. On the other hand, revolutionaries received, or would receive, support comparable to that which the British colonists had received: wealthy merchants generously financed Chinese revolutionaries; America would support Chinese revolutionaries in the future just as France had supported British colonists in the late eighteenth century. Furthermore, the author urged Chinese revolutionaries to follow their American counterparts by observing strict self-discipline, solidifying their determination, establishing assemblies, and building the Independence Hall to unify the 18 provinces.⁸⁹ Last but not least, Nanxia called upon readers to take America as a model to transform

⁸⁸ Nanxia 南俠, 'Zhongguo liansheng zhi duli yu beimei hezhong zhi duli nanyi bijiao lun' 中國聯省之獨立與北美合眾之獨立難易比較論, *Henan* 河南 9 (1907), pp. 8–10.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–19.

post-revolutionary China into a republic, emphasising the importance of electing the president and establishing the constitution, the parliament, and political parties.⁹⁰

With the benefit of hindsight, any student of American or Chinese history today can easily see that Nanxia misunderstood British colonialism in North America and drew a flawed analogy between the American Revolution and the anti-Manchu movement. British colonialism in North America was basically settler colonialism characterised by violent land grabs that drove aboriginal peoples off their own land and continuous efforts to replace original resident communities with settler societies. The American Revolution was also an internal struggle between British elites at home and British colonists in North America. In contrast, the Manchus never intended to expel the Han Chinese and the anti-Manchu revolution was a rebellion of the conquered against the conquerors. Not only was the analogy between Qing China and British America ill-formulated, the comparison between the conditions for revolution in Qing China and those in North America was equally problematic. Manchu control over the Han Chinese, which was exercised through a highly developed bureaucratic structure, was much stronger than British control over its 13 colonies, which were, in many respects, self-governed.

Despite the gulf between the British colonists in North America and the Han Chinese in Qing China, Nanxia defined both as the colonised. It is important to note that he was perhaps not completely unaware of the differences between British America and Qing China. Nanxia admitted that Manchu rule was not colonialism because the Han nation survived, though without a Han ruler, yet he simultaneously claimed that the Qing era was no different to a colonial one.⁹¹ These contradictory statements probably stemmed from his understanding of colonialism as settler colonialism in the image of British practices in North America. This view widened the gulf between the Chinese and the American experiences and should have alienated the anti-Manchu revolution from the American Revolution. Nevertheless, Nanxia still insisted on identifying the Qing era as a colonial one. His contradictory statements fully exemplified the power of the ideology of Western cultural superiority. It motivated Nanxia to ignore all the differences between Qing China and British America and construct an analogy between them so as to borrow the authority of the West to justify the anti-Manchu movement.

Conclusion

Today the Declaration of Independence has become one of the most influential American political documents in the world. Not only has it been translated into numerous languages, it has also provided inspiration for at least 116 declarations of independence in other countries and regions.⁹² Underlying the global dissemination of the declaration was an intention to transplant the American Revolution or an American political culture forged in the revolution. This article provides a case study to look into the translation and transplantation of the American Revolution in East Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It shows that such translation and transplantation have to be understood in local terms. While the Whig interpretation of the American Revolution is present in the core sources that Chinese and Japanese elites used to construct their translations, they chose to ignore or adopt it according to their changing political agendas. Moreover, their decisions influenced each other through the circulation of their translations and discourses between China and Japan.

While highlighting the translator's agency, this article also reveals its limits. The translation of culture does not take place in vacuum. The translator's decision is instead formed

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–29.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹² D. Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence. A Global History* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 145–155.

within a framework set by the power relations between China, Japan, and the West. When Qing China could still hold onto its status as a regional hegemon, Chinese elites felt free to subjugate the American Revolution to a Confucian interpretation and Japanese elites followed suit. Yet when the Qing hegemony collapsed and confidence in Confucian culture was eroded by an ascending belief in Western cultural superiority, Japanese and Chinese elites successively adopted a Whig interpretation of the American Revolution, which they had previously ignored. And, interestingly, Chinese elites were inspired by their Japanese counterparts to embrace the alienness of the American Revolution after they uncovered a new urgency to adopt a Western political system.

Conflicts of interest. None.

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