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International Relations, History, and “Images”

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upon which outsiders project their hopes and fears . . .
where it might be going,
and what consequences that direction will hold
for the rest of the world.*

—David M. Lampton, 2004

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—Deng Yong and Wang Fei Lang, 1999

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND CHINA: A CHALLENGE OF TOPIC AND DISCIPLINARITY

FUTURE, PRESENT, PAST—China and the world matter for each other. From 1842 to 1949, images, attitudes, and structures were forged that shape much of the present debate about China’s place in the world after 1949, as the People’s Republic of China then stood up to, and in, the world (Scott 2007). China’s preceding Century of Humiliation involved both “perception” and “power” in the international system, by the world about China, and by China about the world. Talk of China’s “awakening” was interwoven with talk of China’s “death” (Fitzgerald 1994).

In the story of the West's expansion during the nineteenth century, China had an unusual fate. It did not become a direct Western colony, as did India and most parts of Southeast Asia and Africa. Yet it did not adapt and modernize enough, as did Japan, to enable it to survive intact. Instead, for about one hundred years, China limped along in the international system, neither one thing nor the other. It was the most populous state on the globe, accounting for one-quarter of the world's population, yet it also conceded territory and sovereignty rights to a plethora of outside countries, including even small European countries like Belgium and Portugal with a fraction of its population and size. China was neither a colony nor sovereignly independent. It was in the "Community of Nations," yet humiliatingly seen as the "Ward of [Western] Civilization." Part of the "international system" and its power distributions, it was not necessarily part of "international society" and its shared norms.

China's Century of Humiliation lasted from the First Opium War of 1840–1842 through to the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The changes in China's international fortunes were dramatic. As "a dominant majority civilization that rather suddenly found itself in a minority position in the world . . . in retrospect, China's nineteenth-century experience therefore became a stark tragedy, an unforeseen and certainly enormous decline and fall almost without equal in history" (Fairbank 1978: 3). It brought an extended period of pressure, dismissal, and "disrespect" from the West and later Japan toward China's territorial integrity, legal sovereignty, and civilizational value. As Wang Jingwei summed up in 1928, China became a "pariah among the nations" (1928: v). This situation was unusual for its length of time, in terms of an ongoing ambiguous semidependency.

China's presence in the international system, then and now, has been flush with uncertainties. As Deng Yong and Wang Fei Lang put it, "How China relates to the international system has been a perennial issue besetting both the Chinese nation and the world since China was forcibly drawn into the European-centred international system in the mid-nineteenth century" (1999: 11). Indeed, for Deng Yong, "the experience of China's interaction with the international system clearly shows there exists a fundamental uneasiness in how China relates to the world . . . a highly problematic relationship between China *and* the world" (2000: 42). China has been an ambiguous and unsettling, to adapt Kroestler, ghost in the international machine. China's very presence, in the abstract and in the flesh, was a challenge to the international system. In turn, the presence of the international system in and on China was often an extremely emotive and explosive issue. In part this was because China's weakness enabled outside pressures and humiliating conditions to be placed on it and consequent rivalries to spring up among those outside Powers. For China, an extra demeaning element lay in the Century of Humiliation having replaced and overturned the country's previous preeminence and prestige as the "Middle Kingdom."

That gave rise to a paradox throughout China's period of humiliation, where its "actual" weakness was juxtaposed with perceptions in China and in the West of its latent "potential" strength. Alongside China's ongoing Century of Humiliation as the decrepit Sick Man of Asia lay frequent talk of its awakening and, for some in the West, a lurking Yellow Peril threat. China was seen as a sleeping giant, a double-sided image. On the one hand, it was asleep and inert. On the other hand, if or when it awakened, it was perceived as having the ability to throw its weight around as a giant on the move. Behind these direct images have been the indirect images—for Lampton unwitting testimony now but also then, as to how "China is a giant screen upon which outsiders project their hopes and fears . . . where it might be going, and what consequences that direction will hold for the rest of the world" (2004: 163).

Meanwhile, the emotive ideational sense of "humiliation" had a longer effect across the Chinese political landscape. That period of humiliation and unfulfilled potential cast a long shadow that continues to affect Chinese foreign policy, strategic culture, and *weltanschauung* worldview. Collective memory is an acknowledged feature of national identity and national projection (Halbwachs 1992; Confino 1997). Certainly, the Century of Humiliation entered China's collective memory in a clear and central way. As Hevia put it, "the traumatic events of the last century live on, refracted and distorted through nightmarish dreamscapes about Oriental menaces and obsessions with national humiliation . . . Fu-Manchu phobias in the West and fixations on national humiliation in the People's Republic" (2003: 349, 350).

To deal with this large topic, various integrative analytical tools, approaches, and considerations can be followed from History and International Relations disciplines (Elman and Elman 2001). From their integration, certain overlapping themes become of noticeable significance for the presence and role of China in the international system during its Century of Humiliation—namely culture and identity, race, and images.

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Culture is, of course, difficult to define, though still recognizable in effect. Issues of culture and international power are important issues in History and IR discussions. Among historians, Iriye's paradigm of "International Relations as Intercultural Relations" (1979) is one in which a "cultural approach to diplomatic history can start with the recognition that nations like individuals . . . develop visions, dreams, and prejudices about themselves and the world that shape their intentions . . . the mind-sets of leaders and peoples" (1990: 100, 101; also Stephanson 1998). Lilley and Hunt's "cosmopolitan connection" (1987) deliberately considered social history, the state, and foreign relations together. Equally deliberately, Jespersen's *American Images of*

China from 1931–1949 saw him “bringing together cultural and diplomatic histories” (1996: xv). Strahan’s analysis of the evolution of foreign policy in Australia’s relationship with China also noted the danger of “ignoring or downplaying wider questions of national culture . . . It is necessary to read between and beyond the lines of official records,” for “decision makers did not act in a vacuum or in detached isolation, but in the context of a culture infused with conceptions of . . . place in . . . the world” (1996: 2). China’s normative sense of its own place in the world was diametrically opposed to the place allocated to it in the international system. Westad has argued, in relation to Sino-Soviet relations after 1949 that “the tricky concept of *culture* in international relations does have the advantage that it slips past *ideology* to form general patterns of behaviour, texts, myths, and symbols with an intrinsic value [and thus effects] to a social or ethnic group” (1998: 3). This is also true for various external relations that China was involved in before 1949.

IR scholars have also considered culture. Geoculture has emerged alongside geoeconomics and geopolitics. Dore argued that “cultural differences matter to the student of international order” (1984: 407). Questions of *strategic culture* at the general level (Lantis 2005) and with regard to China (A. Johnston 1995, Scobell 2002) point to China’s past, and to Chinese attitudes and worldview on war and peace generated from its culture. Meanwhile, Kratochwil and Lapid recorded *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (1996), and Tamamoto asserted that “culture and identity have been salient and obvious factors in shaping the history of international relations” (2003: 193). Here, Krause and Renwick have pursued *Identities in International Relations* (1996). Certainly national and international identity issues were prominent in China during its Century of Humiliation, as one-quarter of the world’s population grappled with dealing with the international system, and indeed the international system grappled with dealing with China. For Zhou there was the question of “the shift in the balance of power from East to West” impacting on “Qing ideals, sense of identity . . . and the conflicting systems of these two quite different civilizations” (2007: 447; also Zhang and Xu 2007). Certainly, *China’s Quest for National Identity* (Dittmer and Kim 1993) within the international system is considered in this study.

Moreover, China’s role and impact in the international system during its Century of Humiliation has also affected the national identity of other actors. To China’s north, Lukin argues, “for centuries the image of China has played an important role in Russian thought . . . has played a more general role as a reference point for Russian thinking about Russia itself, its place in the world, its future and the essence of ‘Russianness’” (2002: 86). To China’s south, Strahan argues, “the impact of China on Australia was to become profound, even if often negatively,” where “the encounter with China, an old, highly developed and apparently alien nation brought cultural differences and similarities into sharper focus, encouraging Australians to define themselves”

(1996: 6). Consequently, "Australian national identity gained definition and coherence in juxtaposition to China. Australianness was revealed through the articulation of opinions concerning Chinese, and the question 'What is China' also partly answered the question 'What is Australia'" (6). Similar national identity formations can be seen in the American encounter with China and the Chinese, on both sides of the Pacific.

China interacted with the international system both within its own borders and outside them as Chinese emigrants went out across the Asia-Pacific and became the Other in Australia, Canada, and, above all, the United States. Consequently, identity issues have also been in play across the Asia-Pacific, with Chinese "trans-Pacific . . . borderless family networks" (Liu 2002: 16) creating positive and negative images of the Other. San Francisco's Chinese community was, indeed, "trans-Pacific" (Y. Chen 2000). Ong's *The Cultural Logic of Transnationality* saw the Chinese diaspora as generating "tensions with imagined transnational collectivities . . . racial imaginaries that cut across state borders" (1999: 56, 59), something of relevance for the nineteenth century as well as more recent times. Perceptions were evident around "the potential of widely and dangerously innovative powers associated with Chinese diasporic mobility" (20), then as well as now.

Among IR analysts, cultural forces are highly charged. Pre-1949 China can be taken as a classical case to be examined in the studies of cultural and civilizational conflicts in the international system-cum-society, a theme that evokes Samuel Huntington's subsequent thesis *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996). Huntington's subtitle *The Remaking of the World Order* referred to the post-Cold War period of the 1990s, but an equally profound reordering of the world order in geopolitical and geocultural terms was in play between China and the international system during China's Century of Humiliation, and with equally potent fracture lines, "cultural conflicts . . . along the fault lines between civilizations" (1996: 28). Huntington's consideration of "the shifting balance of civilizations" (79) in the 1990s was also at stake in the nineteenth century with the Western impact on China and the shift in the international balance of power from a China-dominated East to a Europe-dominated West. Certainly "the conflict of civilisations" was discerned by Tang Liangli (1928: 218–34) in his portrayal of the West's relations with China.

Generally, Gaddis wonders if "international relations, in its preoccupation with measuring and quantifying military and economic power, did not leave out certain other forms of power" at play in the modern world—"namely the power of ideas . . . human rivalries . . . arguments about religion, ethnicity, language, culture, and race" (1996: 40–42). In IR terms, there may have been a multipolar international system during China's Century of Humiliation, and with it potential *balancing* opportunities for China. However, Western geocultural solidarity, shown most clearly in 1860 and 1900, hampered China's attempts to use geopolitical divisions among the Western

powers. Of relevance is Hoffmann's sense that "states' foreign policies are shaped not only by realist geopolitical factors such as economics and military power but [also] by forces such as xenophobic passions . . . and transnational ethnic solidarity" (2002: 107; also Crawford 2000). Talk of xenophobic passions and transnational ethnic solidarity leads to consideration of the presence and images of race at play in China's Century of Humiliation.

RACE

Talk of race and of racism as an operative factor in international relations can be uncomfortable. Motosada Zumoto, for one, rejected the role of race in IR dynamics, considering in 1927 that "racial affinity counts for little as a deciding factor in the alignment of nations for political purposes" (1927: 9) in the Asia-Pacific. There may, though, have been an element of the wishful thinking of IR liberalism-functionalism in his dismissal of race as a factor, given that his comments came from a speech at the Third Annual Congress of the International University League of Nations Federation at Geneva. In contrast, Tang Liangli was denouncing the operation of racism in the international system, arguing that "the time has now come for the white races to accept the Chinese as their equals" (1928: 229). Certainly racial stereotyping and dismissals abounded during China's Century of Humiliation, as, for example, in American foreign policy (Weston 1972; Krenn 1998a: 1998b; Horne 1999). Arthur De Gobineau, "the father of racist ideology" (Biddiss 1970), provided a running commentary on China's impact on the international system during the second half of the nineteenth century. Banton's "international politics of race" (2002; also Vincent 1984) was not just something to discern after 1945; it was embedded in the IR setting of previous decades.

China has been seen as a particularly significant nonwestern, nonwhite, race-associated presence in the international system. In part this arose from the size of its population, and with the cliché that "demography is destiny." China's population was a fact but it was also an image, a highly emotive image—a "spectre" (Connelly 2006: 302–04). It existed in a more emotive perceptual sense, Lyman's "longer history" of Yellow Peril "racial group positioning . . . a foundational, essentialist discourse on an entire geocultural area and its inhabitants" which was "composed out of a collage of fear-inspiring stereotypes" (2000: 686, 690, 687). For Dower, "The vision of the menace from the East was always more racial rather than national. It derived not from concern with any one country or people in particular, but from a vague and ominous sense of the vast, faceless, nameless yellow horde, the rising tide, indeed, of color" (1986: 156).

Rational perceptions of China's presence were entwined with an irrational counterpart, encapsulated in what the *Atlantic Monthly* once described as "that strange recurrent nightmare known as the Yellow Peril" (1899: 276). In such geocultural settings, "China as a land becomes tradi-

tionally the image of the ultimate Other . . . the unfamiliar and alien space of China as the image of the Other threatening to break up ordered surfaces" (L. Zhang 1988: 110) and international order. For Seel, the Yellow Peril was a "fantasy that projects Euroamerican desires and dread on the alien other. Consequently, as Western nations began to carve up Asia into colonies, their own imperialist expansion was in part rationalized by the notion that a militarily powerful Asia posed a threat" (1993: 10) in both racial and cultural terms. Similarly, for Marchetti, "The yellow peril combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East" (1993: 2). For Lyman, "The idea of America or the entire Occident, for that matter, being in peril from the 'yellow' people has something of a 'geological' character. It is deeply embedded in the Occidental consciousness of itself . . . an all-too-neglected element in the 'American dilemma' . . . the lair of the yellow peril's firebreathing dragon is to be found in the winding labyrinth of the American psyche" (2000: 727). At the time, Robert Park saw it "as an abstraction, a symbol, and a symbol not merely of his own race but of the Orient and of that vague, ill-defined menace we sometimes refer to as the 'Yellow Peril'" (1914: 611).

Talk of the Orient brings up Said's *Orientalism*; "a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient . . . a discourse . . . by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically . . . militarily, ideologically," and "imaginatively" (1995: 3; also 1993). In short, Said saw this as an attempt "to rub culture's nose in the mud of politics" (1995: 13). Yet China evaded total control by the West. It always remained too large, not only geopolitically but also geoculturally. Nevertheless, Said still remains relevant, through his view of Western literature as reflecting and affecting, reinforcing and legitimating, political colonial-imperial power structures through such embedded imagery. This entwining of language, images, and power was well illustrated in Hevia's *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (2003). All this points to consideration of "images" at play in the consideration of culture and power at the international level, and with specific regard to the relationship between China and the international system.

IMAGES

Questions of image have attracted some attention among international relations scholars—what Jervis called *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (1970; also 1976). Geopsychology joins geopolitics? In IR theory terms, the recent emergence of *constructivism* and its focus on the roles of constructed images and perceptions is particularly useful. Like culture and identity, image also matters in International Relations; even if only in Isaacs' sense that

“images, feelings, prejudices . . . get somehow cranked into the process of policymaking” (1972: xxviii). Consequently, for Buszynski, “all too often images and symbols rather than cold logic and analysis are the [actual] currency of international relations” (2004: 7). Indeed, Sanders has judged that “it almost goes without saying that perceptions of the participants in international relations are often as important, often more important, than ‘objective reality,’ whatever that may be” (2001: v; also Jervis 1976: 28). Of course the perceptions can be very different. As Callahan argues, the IR English School treatment of Western intervention in China as showing “the ‘benefits’ of International Society” (2004a: 312) to China can be contrasted with Chinese views of the same period as one of national humiliation and international inequalities, as the imposition *on* one part of the international system (China) *by* another part of the international system (the West).

Some historians also advocate incorporating wider, “unofficial,” cultural-image approaches to international history alongside a narrower, “official,” political-diplomatic Rankean paradigm. Amid his analysis of foreign policy in Republican China, Kirby argues that “diplomatic history,” with its focus on formal state-to-state relations, was limited, for “foreign policy is but one part of foreign relations, and may in any event be a cultural construct. Hence the importance . . . of ‘images,’ ‘perceptions,’ ‘belief system,’ and ‘cognitive maps’” (1997: 434), so that “as important as the interests and actions of other nation states is the ‘set of lenses,’ through which information about them is viewed” (435). “Power” is itself affected by perceptions, as quantitative military and economic *hard power* is supplemented by consideration of cultural-ideational *soft power*. This brings in the extent to which a country—a civilization, its values, and norms—is estimated and found attractive by others, a matter of image and perceptions, and thereby of influence.

Specific applications have been made to bilateral aspects of China’s relationships. Iriye considers that Sino-American relations contained a mutual “storehouse of images” that could be given “privileged status” in times of “war, peace, or situations in-between” (1988: 39). Garver holds “the history of Sino-American relations is replete with [Jervis-wise] misperceptions and misunderstandings” (1999: ix–x). Hunt similarly argues, “Americans held to the reassuring myth of a golden age of friendship engendered by altruistic American aid and rewarded by ample Chinese gratitude” (1983: 299) during the pre-1914 period; but “what was ‘special’ was the degree to which two distinctly different people became locked in conflict, the victims in some measure of their own misperceptions and myths” (301) about each other. Jespersen’s study *American Images of China 1931–1949* closely followed the “images, conceptions and cultural constructions” at play during that period: “the beliefs, motions, stereotypes, opinions, mental pictures, and perhaps most importantly the hopes that were all a part of the intracultural dynamics of the popular thinking about China” (1996: xix). Such elements of public

opinion and public images affected public policy-making. All these elements in play from Jespersen can be used here, but also extended to bring in fears as well as hopes, to bring in pre-1931 as well as post-1931 developments, and to bring in Chinese images of America as well as American images of China. Lukin has noticed how "mutual perceptions play an especially important role in bilateral relations between neighbours with long and complicated histories, and Russia and China surely belong to this category" (2002: 86) and with it "the psychological problems plaguing their relationships" (10). For Strahan, in understanding Australian reactions to China, the "crucial point here is to note how various aspects of Chinese 'reality' were construed. Facts are not inert and neutral; perception transforms them into different shapes . . . truth was frequently so encrusted with myth as to bear little relation to China's 'actuality'" (1996: 8).

If one stands back, there were various images, hopes, and fears in play: the West's image of China, the West's images of itself revealed through its images of China, China's images of the West, and China's images of itself as revealed through its image of the West. The paired oppositional nature of these images is noticeable. China as threat or China the sick man; the West as evil or the West as savior? Said's *Orientalism* (Said 1995; also H. Hung 2003) can be juxtaposed with Buruma and Margalit's *Occidentalism* (2005: 38–39). In many ways China can be compared to the Ottoman Empire, China as the Sick Man of Asia and Turkey as the sick man of Europe, in which both posed Eastern Questions to international stability. Both had humiliating treaties and restrictions imposed on them during the nineteenth century, both had Saidian *Orientalism* images associated with them. Yet China remained territorially much more intact and with greater latent strength than the visibly fragmented Ottoman realm. China's image remained more enigmatic, as did her power position. Given the myriad levels of images of China, it is not surprising that sources for reconstructing them are likewise varied.

SOURCES

The final point to make here is that there exists a wide range of sources able to be fruitfully used for reconstructing these cognitive images at play between China and the international system during China's Century of Humiliation. This reflects the wider forces shaping international relations among states, where Johnson has noted how "foreign policy is not a neat, relatively technical activity [just] performed by the government"; it "also involves the sometimes uncontrollable elements of public emotion, invidious national comparisons . . . mass media of communications" (1986: 402). The rise of the press in the West affected perceptions and policies. In the United States, Randolph Hearst's Yellow Press was strident in its projections

about the Yellow Peril posed by China, and was capable of swaying both the public and politicians. The Shanghai press was a vibrant outlet for both Western “Shanghaianders” and Chinese commentators. “Media discourse” affected wider cultural and political trends.

Meanwhile, in any consideration of images held at large, the role of literature as shaping, mediating, and reflecting collective memory can feed in, recalling the old Chinese adage that “literature and history are subjects not to be separated” (wen shi bufen jia). Said’s analysis in *Orientalism* linked “a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts . . . scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description” entwined with the “power political . . . power intellectual . . . power cultural,” which “does not exist in some archival vacuum” (1995: 12–13). One can apply Rotter’s focus on nonofficial yet relevant “novels, films, plays, and travellers’ accounts to describe those ideas that shaped or influenced U.S. foreign policy,” in which diplomatic historians “increasingly recognize that realms of culture and politics, attitudes and behaviour, are related in important ways and are at least mutually constitutive” (2000: 1214). Novels, plays, poetry, and travel narratives are also used in this study.

Such high-brow literature operates and needs to be considered at the low populist level as well. Thus, for example, “the Yellow Peril was naturally the stuff of fantasy and cheap thrills, a fit subject for pulp literature . . . and there were many [media figures, analysts, politicians] who addressed the alleged threat from the East in a manner that made a significant impact” (Dower 1986: 156) in society and politics. Finally comes Hunt’s point that “the most influential work in the history of China’s foreign relations has always incorporated the private with the public, the official with the nonofficial, on a stage where ‘nonstate actors’ can steal the show” (1983: 434). Ranke’s “diplomatic archives” will be supplemented in this volume with Said’s “cultural archives.” Language itself matters, in that it reflects and affects images at play. Lydia Liu’s recent work on “the semiotics of international relations” (2004: 5–30) in her *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* comes to mind, as does Hevia’s *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (2003). Meanwhile, whereas earlier studies by Isaacs and others have tended to focus on literary images of China, this study embeds such material more directly into and alongside associated political images—the actions and policies of the day.

Since the international system was shaped and dominated by the West, many sources reflect Western response and projection toward China. In turn, China responded to this Western-dominated international system. Such Chinese responses became a further spark for Western reactions in turn. This use of Western sources is not intended to fall into Said’s constricts and constructs in *Orientalism*, their use is not to say that China was inert and passive, nor to

say that China was faced with an inherently dynamic West. Rather it is a matter of power distribution in the international system. China's autonomy, let alone projection, became circumscribed; it had much less room for action than did the West. Conversely, the West had more autonomy; indeed, it came to dominate the international system. It could and did project its power within the international system onto China in a way that China never was able to do onto the West. China was in the so-called family of nations, but it was also put in a straightjacket for much of the time—hence its humiliation. Yet paradoxically the West often feared China. This story of mutual but asymmetrical encounter now unfolds.