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IMPERIALISM AND NATIONALISM AS MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT DISCOURSES

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This article analyses those imperialist and national discourses that the Chinese and the British constructed, particularly during the May Fourth Movement, in China in the 1910s and 1920s. Moreover, the paper explores the form, content, and impact of May Fourth rhetoric on national identity, concentrating on the cultural, historical, and political dimensions of nationalism presented in China. It is clear that the May Fourth protestors, especially urban and educated men, dominated public articulations of national identities. With their control of knowledge production, and in some cases control of state bureaucracies, elite men were able to make demands for the nation, often combining their own group needs with specific definitions of the nation. British discourse that was constructed during the May Fourth Movement responded to a reality that was infinitely adaptable in its function of preserving the basic structures of imperial power. For the British, the May Fourth demonstrators represented a potential change in the level of existing intellectual, political, social, and economic stability, which for decades had guaranteed the British a privileged position in the country. As result, discussions on nationalism and imperialism became a crucial part of the Sino-British May Fourth Movement discourse.

INTRODUCTION

On May fourth in 1919, around 3,000 university students gathered together at Tiananmen Square in Beijing and started a series of demonstrations that would later be named the May Fourth Movement (*Wusi Yundong*). The demonstrators distributed flyers declaring that the Chinese could not accept the concession of Chinese territory to Japan, as stipulated at the Versailles Peace Conference held in the spring of 1919. Protests, demonstrations, and strikes spread throughout the capital and, over the next few weeks, across the entire country. (Chow 1980: 84–144) During the following months, Chinese students drafted manifestos, protested on the streets, and were regularly sent to jail, where they faced prosecution. Finally they mobilised nationwide support from workers and merchants, and thus they discovered their mission as permanent persuaders. The emergent political and social awareness, mixed with radical nationalism, led to widespread protests that would alter the political culture and practice of student and elite groups. They seriously threatened the imperial and national status quo regarding the established treaty ports used by the Westerners, Japanese, and Russians. Chinese nationalism was clearly reflected in various representations of the May Fourth Movement, which displayed concerns for the linked themes of internal unification, international position, and a common Chinese culture.

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The British community had over seventy years of history in China, as the blueprint for the treaty-port system was drafted already in the Treaty of Nanjing, signed in 1842. According to the treaty, five Chinese ports – namely Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, Xiamen, and Guangzhou – were initially opened to British trade. Other Western countries were quick to sign similar treaties with China, and these agreements shaped political and commercial relations between the Western countries and China for the next century, as numerous other cities were soon opened to trade.[1] The treaties allowed foreigners to live and work in these treaty ports. In Shanghai, foreigners were able to rent land within the borders of municipalities named the International Settlement, French Concession, and the (Chinese) Municipality of Greater Shanghai. Moreover, the treaties supported and protected foreign missionaries, officials, and merchants when they travelled along rivers. (Airaksinen 2005: 34–40) In 1920, there were around 470 million inhabitants in China; out of these, approximately 326,000 were foreigners. Shanghai was the largest expatriate community, with over 60,000 foreigners. Among the foreigners living in China at the turn of the twentieth century, the British were the most active and influential, and British influence was more visible in Shanghai than anywhere else in China. They were deeply involved in contemporary politics and eager to protect their national interests in the country, and accordingly, the May Fourth political activities were a matter of great concern.

The Chinese were faced with multiple imperial nationalisms at the beginning of the twentieth century. First, the foreign Qing dynasty had imposed imperial nationalism on China since its establishment in the seventeenth century. Secondly, Euro-American imperial nationalism had been enforced since the Opium Wars. Finally, China was influenced by Japanese imperial nationalism, which came into play after the Twenty-One Demands were introduced in 1915.[2]

This article analyses discourses on imperialism and nationalism constructed by the Chinese and British, particularly during the May Fourth Movement. Accordingly, the work will also address the interaction between the Chinese and foreigners and the impact of this interaction on the development of the May Fourth Movement, as well as the national rhetoric expressed by the Chinese and the British. The discourse on May Fourth nationalism was a component in the construction of Chinese nationalism, which produced manifold local and global meanings. The article will explore both Chinese and British May Fourth nationalism through the contemporary political culture that predominated in China. If we accept the hypothesis that national identity has five dimensions – psychological, cultural, historical, political, and territorial (Guibernau 2007: 11–32) – this paper concentrates on an analysis of the cultural, historical, and political domains of nationalism. First, the May Fourth Movement is discussed as event. Secondly, the British imperial presence and national rhetoric in China is analysed. Finally, Chinese nationalism during the May Fourth period will come under scrutiny. The May Fourth Movement itself has already been explored as an instrument for early Chinese nationalism (see Chow 1980; Schwarcz 1986). Moreover, the development of modern Chinese nationalism has been thoroughly addressed by researchers (see Lin 1979; Mitter 2004). Thus, this article specifically seeks to illustrate the unique local Sino-British understanding of nationalism and imperialism that culminated in Shanghai as a particular result of the May Fourth Movement. This unique reconciliation provided a model for further negotiations of national identities throughout China.

1 Western countries included, for example, France, Germany, America, Spain, Denmark, Portugal, and the Netherlands.

2 The Twenty-One Demands were a group of requests presented by the Japanese government to China in January 1915 to extend Japanese economic and political influence over Manchuria and China.

THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT AS EVENT

The inauguration of the Versailles Peace Conference reactivated the patriotic spirit among the Chinese intelligentsia. As a direct result of secret treaties that had been drafted between Western countries and Japan during WWI, it was decided to cede the former German empire's imperial holdings in the Shandong peninsula to China's archenemy Japan. From the Chinese perspective, therefore, the secret treaties failed to respect China's sovereignty and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 was a complete betrayal of the "Wilsonian principles";[3] already disappointed young Chinese intellectuals were infuriated. Thus, international politics in Europe intensified anti-Japanese sentiment in China, while disillusionment with the political disintegration of warlord China reflected weakened state authority. Finally, the pro-Japanese ministers in the Chinese central government and their perceived "betrayal of the country" to Japanese militarists galvanised the students for the May Fourth protests. At this point, all the ingredients for a radical movement were visible, and international and domestic politics prompted the May Fourth incident in Beijing. (Chow 1980)

Thousands of students from different Beijing universities hit the streets to demonstrate against the Treaty of Versailles, and many activists were arrested by the police. News of the demonstrations, and particularly the protesting students' arrests, quickly spread throughout the country. Many newspapers published editorials demanding that the students should be released. Before long, protests along similar lines as those in Beijing broke out in a number of other large cities, such as Tianjin, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Guangzhou. Moreover, labour strikes were organised during the summer of 1919. Shops began to close, making the situation tense. Some Japanese residents were attacked and Japanese goods were boycotted. (Wasserstrom 1991: 31–71)

The emergent political and social awareness was mixed with radical nationalism. The result was widespread protests, which altered the political culture and practice of student and established elite groups. Disturbances continued, more or less, until the Beijing government agreed to some of the protestors' demands and decided that the arrested students would be released. Three cabinet officials were also dismissed and the entire cabinet handed in its resignation. In Versailles, the Chinese delegation stated that it was not willing to sign the Peace Treaty. Arguments over the Shandong problem continued for three more years, and it was only at the Washington Conference in 1921–1922 that the issue was finally settled and Japan withdrew its territorial claim.[4]

The May Fourth Movement initiated a patriotic outburst of new urban intellectuals against Japanese imperialists and Chinese warlords. These intellectuals identified the political establishment with China's failure in the modern era, and hundreds of new periodicals published critiques of Chinese traditions, turning instead to foreign ideas and ideologies. The movement split into leftist and liberal wings. The latter advocated gradual cultural reform as exemplified by Hu Shih, who interpreted the pragmatism of American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952), while leftists

3 US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points were composed in 1918 to support post-war sentiments of nationalism and democracy.

4 The Washington Conference was convened by the US to tackle many political questions left after the Versailles Peace Conference and to establish military balance in the Pacific.

introduced Marxism and advocated political action.[5] The movement also popularised vernacular literature and promoted educational reforms and political participation by women.

Chow Tse-tsung's classic work on the May Fourth Movement illustrates the important impact of foreign events on the developments of the movement. However, his central objective is to develop an extensive analysis of social, political, and cultural aspects related only to the incident itself. (Chow Tse-tsung 1980) Reflecting another perspective, Joseph Chen (1971: 1–39) underlines the differences between the movements in Beijing and Shanghai. He bases his notions on dissimilarities in the demographic, social, and economic structures of Beijing and Shanghai, respectively, and accordingly, how the May Fourth Movement developed differently in the two cities. Shanghai was a more modern, Western-oriented treaty port with influential international communities, and it had vital elements of commercialism and industrialism. However, Chen does not discuss the influence of foreigners on the movement's ideologies and activities. Indeed, in Shanghai the students were able to escape the Chinese government's suppressive measures by establishing offices and publishing houses inside the foreign-administered areas. Due to poor co-operation between the International Settlement and the French Concession, prohibition in one area did not lead to interruptions of operations in another. The students just simply crossed the border.

The May Fourth Movement's ideological backgrounds were closely connected to the New Culture Movement, which had developed by the mid-1910s among the Chinese intelligentsia.[6] The New Culture Movement extended and popularised a socially critical outlook, and it added to the surge of intellectuals exploring foreign "-isms". The disillusioning outcome of the First World War's peace-making had stirred a consciousness of China's vulnerability and the urgency of action to bring it out of its backwardness. However, various distinctive features of the movements separated them. The New Culture Movement was more ideologically cultural, non-political, and intellectual, whereas the May Fourth Movement was born out of protests against global politics in Versailles. Furthermore, it catalysed many classes of Chinese society. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 has, in retrospect, been perceived as the core of anti-Christian and anti-foreign movements, as well as the beginning of women's emancipation and radical nationalism. It is also said to have provided the ideological basis of the Chinese Communist Party. The May Fourth Movement is also consistently referred to in explanations of the backgrounds of the great Chinese movements during the twentieth century (for example, the Hundred Flowers Campaign (1956–1957), the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and the Tiananmen Square Democracy Movement (1989)). (Hughes 2006: 13, 52–53).

Sidney Tarrow (1994: 3–4) has appropriately defined a movement in general as a collective challenge by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with the elite, opponents, and authorities. It is worth noting that Chinese students who had been studying abroad already had some experience of participating and even organising movements. Also, an experience of united labour strikes had been gained in Europe when Chinese workers were sent into

5 Hu Shih (1891–1962) was a philosopher, essayist and, in his later life, a diplomat. A leading liberal intellectual in the May Fourth Movement, his most significant contribution was the promotion of vernacular literature to replace the classical style of writing. Hu Shih was also a leading critic and analyst of traditional Chinese culture and thought. He was ambassador to the United States (1938–1942), Chancellor of Beijing University (1946–1948), and after 1958 President of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan.

6 The New Culture Movement was born among the Chinese intelligentsia already in 1915 as a means to support literary reform. It emphasised self-transformation of the nation by rejecting traditional Confucian principles and fostering Western ideologies.

factories to replace the labour force fighting in WWI. Apparently, these Chinese workers were actively involved in the strikes. Nevertheless, the May Fourth Movement presented a challenge for the Chinese to recognise their common interests and to translate them into collective action. As it turned out, the magnitude of activities was comparable to no other contemporary movement.

BRITISH NATIONALISM FACING THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT

Politically and financially, the most powerful British group was made up of businessmen, including traders, bankers, manufacturers and the managers of mines, shipping industries, and railways. Other major groups consisted of British governmental and municipal officials and missionaries. Another significant sector in the British community was made up of miscellaneous groups that provided services at the treaty port settlements; these included, for example, journalists, lawyers, teachers, real estate agents, shopkeepers, and engineers.

Although the British were outsiders in China, they had been able to create their own municipal administration (for example, in Shanghai's International Settlement), together with other Western countries and Japan. In Shanghai, the British had founded a strong municipal government led by the Shanghai Municipal Council ("the Council"), which was responsible for public utilities and security, but in reality controlled the whole foreign community. It was a committee of nine annually elected members (often six British, two Americans, and one Japanese), usually chaired by a British member. These members were frequently managers of large companies (such as the Jardine, Matheson & Company, Butterfield and Swire, or the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation), elected to the Council at the annual Ratepayers General Meeting. Maintenance of this peculiar oligarchy was secured by an electoral system that was based on property franchise; it was a limited franchise in which only the wealthiest businessmen had the privilege to vote. The Council believed that administratively it was responsible only to the ratepayers of the Settlement. (Kotenev 1925: 561–564)

Another exceptional feature of the Council was its ability to operate without deriving its powers from the legislative assembly of any government, as much of its legitimacy was established on a code of local laws that had been implemented using the foreign nations' extraterritorial laws.[7] The Council had no internationally recognised judicial power, and hence its hegemony was based on incoherent land regulations and subsequently added by-laws (*Land Regulations and By-Laws* 1923). The Council ruled the International Settlement by means of twelve different departments and employed over 600 people, the great majority being British residents. In addition, the foreign settlement had its own mixed court for disputes between foreigners and Chinese. The Shanghai Municipal Police were used to secure the safety of the area, while in times of emergency – such as during the May Fourth Movement – the police were assisted by the Shanghai Volunteer Corps. With the assistance of its various organisations, the Council's power of policing and taxation asserted sovereignty over the municipality and the population, foreign or Chinese. Moreover, the Council increasingly dictated foreigners' attitudes towards the Chinese and, accordingly, towards the May Fourth activities. (Shanghai Municipal Archives 1920, U1-3-1, Minutes of Shanghai Municipal Council)

A primary objective of British foreign policy was to create a world market economy based on free trade, freedom of movement for capital, and a unified international monetary system.

7 According to extraterritorial laws the immigrants remained subjected to the laws of their own country instead of Chinese laws. Thus, foreigners were subjects of their own consular jurisdiction.

Therefore, the relationship between economics and politics was a key issue in British relations with China. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Americans and Japanese had intensified their influence in China, whereas WWI had drained Britain, leaving her struggling with her own domestic and imperial problems. It was obvious that the rise of British economic power in the nineteenth century and the feeling of superiority, which spread simultaneously with industrial progress at home and the expansion of territory abroad, were gradually weakening in China. In order to perpetuate her established position within the economic and political spheres of influence in China, Britain had to perform. From this perspective, British interests were less important in terms of the domestic economy than in terms of the regional supremacy that they represented in Asia. The war had offered a welcome boost for British sales in the East, yet the Armistice had also brought a sharp cut in market prices. In spite of diminishing government exports to China, British companies' investments in property, land, industry, commerce, and banking guaranteed their authority in the municipality administration of treaty ports. British investments helped support her dominant position in China, since almost a third of foreign investment was British. Stocks, land, buildings, and factories often financed by Chinese, British, and other foreigners were primary components of the contemporary investor's portfolio. Out of all land owned by the Chinese, over 80% of foreign-registered properties in the International Settlement were held by the British, while half of the real-estate value in the French Concession was nominally in their name. (Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, HSBC Holdings plc, Group Archives, Shanghai Managerial Correspondence 1919–1921; Clifford 1991: 41–47) In 1920, foreign trade statistics show that Britain and its crown colony Hong Kong had combined imports to China of 36.4%, with exports being 33.7% (*Chinese Maritime Customs* 1921: 7). The British merchants exercised control over this business.

In order to illustrate the development of the British nationalistic project in China, we have to discuss the British sense of "self" in contrast to "other" and the ways in which these were portrayed in China. At the beginning of the twentieth century, British settlers in China carefully constructed their own national identity – which at times coincided with the rise of Chinese radical nationalism. British contact with the Chinese naturally involved identification, differentiation, sameness and otherness, and desire and attraction as well as dislike. To understand British national rhetoric during the May Fourth Movement, it is important to analyse the language that they used. Because multiple political, economic, and religious interests can be interpreted in this language, looking at the British manifestos we need to analyse the authorised language that they created and used to communicate their objectives and interests during the May Fourth period. The language was part of an activity by means of which the British attempted to define national identity and to control other community members and their understanding of it. Moreover, the language provided tools to legitimise the British presence and policies. (Jardine, Matheson and Corporation Archives, twentieth century correspondence) Authorised language is interpreted by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as a symbolic power that is exercised in order to acquire more concrete domination. Bourdieu (1991: 23, 107–116, 163–170) indicates that symbolic power is a linguistically expressed "invisible" power, which is often "misrecognised" as such and, therefore, is "recognised" as legitimate. This requires that those subjected to it believe in the legitimacy of power and the legitimacy of those who wield it. Hegemony is in some sense conferred by those who obey, and authorised language is a relevant example of this. Bourdieu argues that "the symbolic power – as a power of constituting is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it, in the

very structure of the field in which belief is produced and reproduced". Bourdieu continues the discussion of how to implement symbolic power in society in order to sustain domination. Thus, the Council issued warnings and notifications to May Fourth demonstrators. In these notifications, protestors' activities were condemned as a threat to the Land Regulations, which formed, from the British perspective, a legitimate basis for their foreign presence. Moreover, the Movement was perceived as an illegal act that threatened British national security and was therefore a "riot" or "rebellion" against the foreign authority. (Shanghai Municipal Archives 1920, Shanghai Municipal Council, Annual Report 1919: 46A, 75A) Threats to authority were a major concern for the British community, as the following letter indicates:

> As you are aware Shanghai has, since I last wrote you at length, past [*sic*] through some troublesome times and the last has not been heard of them yet. We had the Students Demonstration over the Shantung question which eventually reached the proportions of the riot and necessitated the use of armed force to quell the disturbances. It is only fair to say that if the students had been able to control the situation, in all probability, no serious rioting would have taken place but once the demonstration was started it gave the opportunity to all the riff-raff and malcontents and loafers to join in and create trouble. The very fate, however, of the students demonstrations at all shows the trend of events in China and the inconvenience caused by the closing the shops and the striking employees in foreign employ showed the Chinese the power of "passive resistance" tactics and one may be sure in the future they will not be slow to avail themselves of the same means of attaining the ends. (*China Association Circulars* Feb. 1918 – Apr. 1920, nos 261–278)

British society in China as a whole produced and reproduced national rhetoric, which was established to support the existing socio-political order in the country. Thus, a textual personification of authority served particular group interests, which they tended to present as universal interests that should be shared by the people of China. The British emigrants contributed to the fictitious creation of a dominant class of foreigners by supporting the worldview that defined their existence. British national self-reflections included various dimensions of colonial encounters that were interpreted in correspondence, articles and reports. The British expatriates' threefold identity – which consisted of local identity, British identity, and imperial identity – was undoubtedly reflected in propaganda materials and policies directed at the May Fourth demonstrators. The British local identity was reflected first in communal treaty-port politics, where "Britishness" defined people as part of the nation. Imperial identity dominated the understanding of Great Britain's position as the world's greatest colonial power. (Bickers 1999: 68–108) It was obvious that British observations reflected imperialist expressions of the surrounding society, which also mirrored preconceived British cultural and ethnic ideas and Protestant moral principles. This British political belief system had an impact on their decision-making behaviour. It reflected various social, class-based, and ethnic-oriented presumptions introduced in international relations, and thus constantly shaped and constrained policy choices. (*North China Herald* June–July 1919; Smith 1988: 32–35)

Having witnessed the Movement, British residents shared some collective perceptions which, in turn, reflected fears and expectations about their presence in China. At first, due to fears of spreading xenophobia associated with the May Fourth activities, serious attempts were made to delegitimise the Movement as an anti-foreign demonstration. Connections and similarities were drawn to the Boxers, who had attacked foreigners two decades earlier.[8] Secondly, the British

8 The Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), as it was later named, was a peasant uprising in which the Chinese attempted to drive foreigners out of China. It has been estimated that over 110,000 people were killed during the uprising, out of which around 250 were foreigners.

community expressed the need to maintain peace and stability in the Settlement or in areas where they operated. Thirdly, they all had something "British" – or at least from their perspective it was characteristically British – to protect. The British education system and the principle of free trade, including free capital movements, were examples of British prestige in China. Moreover, respect for Western law and regulations were equated with British officials' principal ideals of model society established in the International Settlement. The British assumption was for everyone to respect the Council's authority, and accordingly they formed the rhetoric that emerged, which expressed common British, imperial, Western, and Christian values. In this way, the May Fourth discussions also created implicit collective rules for British communal behaviour. This cohesion within the British community included shared attitudes towards politics as an activity, and it also included the constant repetition of important words (Hunt 1984: 13–14).

As will be explored below, the sudden rise of Chinese radical nationalism was indeed a serious threat to foreign, and particularly British, hegemony in the International Settlement. For the British, the May Fourth demonstrators represented a potential change in the existing intellectual, political, social, and economic *status quo*, which for decades had guaranteed the British a privileged position in the treaty ports.

CHINESE MAY FOURTH NATIONALISM

Following their British neighbours, the Chinese activists also created May Fourth rhetoric by means of which they could express their Movement's values. This was done initially in order to transact with the British, but later it extended to the entire foreign community in China. The initial purpose was to maintain "cordial relations" with the British and to achieve the support of expatriates for their Chinese activities. In order to reach a wider audience, all printed materials targeted at foreigners were eloquently written, usually in English but also in French or in German when necessary. Obviously, when they directed the rhetoric to Chinese groups (such as officials, the business community, students, or other citizens) they wrote the texts in Chinese vernacular (*baihua*) or occasionally in classical Chinese (*wenyan wen*). The core of the national discussion was formed by Western concepts (for example, nationalism, liberalism, and democracy), which were re-interpreted to be able to operate in a contemporary Chinese context. Besides expressing prevalent local and national identities, May Fourth propaganda also introduced certain class-related identities. It has been shown that the new urban elite attempted to challenge traditional political and social structures in order to modernise China. Similarly, it was inevitable that the May Fourth ideologies, as they began to express national sentiments, catalysed the radical wing of the bourgeoisie. May Fourth activities triggered the formation of a political consciousness among the new elite, who wanted a more influential position in the political sphere. Representation in the treaty-port political system appeared as an attractive option to the politically active elite. (Bergère 1989: 209–217; Luo 1920: 607–608)

Closely related to Chinese representation in the treaty-port administration question was the Chinese demand to abolish foreign extraterritorial rights in the International Settlement. This request was based on the international principle to guarantee countries' national self-determination, as had been agreed after the war. Earlier in the spring of 1919, the Armistice had first been discussed by the Chinese intelligentsia, and students had been especially active in campaigning for its finalisation. Furthermore, President Wilson's Fourteen Points were understood to oppose secret agreements, such as the one between Japan and Britain, which allowed the Japanese to assume the German position in China. However, in spite of some American activists' support of

the May Fourth Movement and its ideology, the American government and president officially only offered their sympathies but never acutely considered co-operating with Chinese nationalists to solve the country's problems. (Wang 2005: 66–71; Zhang 1991: 76, 121)

Already in January 1919, Chinese merchant organisations had distributed circulars to mobilise their groups to rally against such secret agreements. When the Chinese negotiators had refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles, agitation to abrogate the special spheres of influence and extraterritorial rights immediately intensified. The British press, however, censured all claims that would endanger the current presence of foreigners in China. From the perspective of President Wilson's principles, China had legitimate rights (for example, national post and telegram systems and autonomy of its customs tariff). According to the Chinese, the withdrawal of foreign police forces and an abolition of foreign concessions appeared to be a natural continuation of this process. Modern Western rights – such as freedom of speech and of the press, and the right to public assembly – were regularly analysed, published in the newspapers, and distributed in pamphlets. (Chen 1971: 67; *North China Herald* July 1919) In reality, the whole May Fourth Movement had partly been created to actualise these ideals. For the most part, China's societal change was the most urgent question; in order to achieve it, certain political changes, especially those related to the foreigners' prerogatives in China, were necessary.

It is relevant to point out that the principles presented and accepted in the Washington Conference, reflecting the idea of a sovereign China as part of the international community, had already been presented in Beijing and Shanghai during the May Fourth demonstrations in the summer and autumn of 1919. The centre of the Movement had, however, moved to Shanghai after that city's general strike. In Shanghai, the foreign areas were politically protected from Chinese central government control. To some extent, the growth of Chinese nationalism in the International Settlement was explicitly reflected in the agitation for Chinese representation in treaty-port administration. Just as an initial attempt to present national unity was taking place, protests against the press licence were provoked in order to maintain the May Fourth protagonists' freedom to express opinions in the newspapers. Regardless of all these actions, there remained a lack of a well-defined national objective and, on the whole, Chinese responses to nationalist issues lacked consistency.

Anxiety levels between the foreign police authorities and the Chinese students had steadily intensified during the protests and strikes. This tense situation seems to have been recognised by the May Fourth activists, who attempted to defuse the strained atmosphere by placing student corps around the treaty ports to assist the police when necessary. Chinese traditional social discipline organisations – a corps was called a "group of ten" – were re-established to limit violence and disturbances.[9] In spite of these efforts, however, some Japanese were assaulted and a few were even killed. Some other foreigners were also attacked. The May Fourth activists' initial strategy to co-operate with foreign municipal officials was followed overall, and the May Fourth student forces perceived themselves to be as legitimate as the British authorities, but particularly when the student corps attempted to implement vigilante law, they were categorised by the British as "a riotous group anxious to control the whole society". The resulting situation produced friction, as the Chinese students failed to effectively communicate their political significance for the foreign oligarchy and the foreigners were unwilling to sacrifice

9 The "group of ten" (or *baojia*) was a traditional household registration system. During the May Fourth Movement, such groups controlled crowds like the police force.

their precious privileges in the treaty ports. Indeed, the British administration resisted any degree of Chinese control, while the Chinese student corps who patrolled the streets undermined British prestige. For the Chinese students, the May Fourth corps operated as an example of the students' ability to supervise national activities. The treaty ports provided "a testing field" where various persuasive and coercive national campaigns could be experimented with and modified for future operations. (Shanghai Municipal Archives 1919, U1-91-19, Shanghai Municipal Police; Wasserstrom 1991: 72–92)

The May Fourth activists clearly proved that it was a matter of Chinese national pride to display strength and unity when they challenged foreign residents. The May Fourth Movement introduced a novel sense of modern national identity. Moreover, the activists had to find a way of dealing with Japanese and Western imperial political and cultural challenges, since the previous Chinese dynasties had humiliatingly failed to do so. This manifestation was particularly important, as the Chinese often believed that foreigners did not take seriously their attempts to control the growing May Fourth Movement. More significantly, Japanese newspapers characterised the May Fourth Movement as a "five-minute patriotism" that was merely a renewal of previous short-lived and enthusiastic boycott attempts, which would die off as soon as activities threatened Chinese merchants' businesses or personal interests. Some British observers preferred to characterise it with patronising assumptions, predicting its imminent failure or calling it – as the British Consul-General did – "blind folly". (Shanghai Municipal Archives 1920, U1-3-1, Minutes of Shanghai Municipal Council)

In general, the May Fourth activists recognised those policies that fortified the sense of national honour that was crucial to the success of the Movement. In fact, all Chinese patriotic activities were perceived as essential in order to confront foreign treaty-port authorities. The expatriate community was not disposed to favour this view. The opposite, "saving face", was instead recognised as a deeply embedded and negative characteristic in the psyche of the Chinese people. The British invented the concept of "face pidgin" to criticise the Chinese way of saving face and, accordingly, their status. (*China Year Book 1921–1922*: 547) In this regard, the May Fourth demonstrators' demand to conduct a final flag-waving march through Shanghai's International Settlement in order to celebrate the achievements of their strike was identified by the British as another attempt to usurp power. The victory parade was even more feared as an indicator of the foreign community's defeat by Chinese nationalism. For the May Fourth protestors, the end of the general strike was the Movement's first major victory and a powerful demonstration of Chinese patriotism. In addition, the Chinese merchants expected some moral acceptance of their boycott and strike activities, and they needed a victory parade after a symbolically and realistically successful strike. Instead, celebrating demonstrators received a hostile response from British municipal authorities. The patriotic and non-violent parade was condemned as "a riot of a belligerent mob" (Chen 1971: 167–172), a comment that revealed the nasty side of the British authorities. Contrary to all expectations within the Chinese community, the British rejected the parade. The qualities of "stiff upper lip" or "protecting Western values and principles" were the principles that the British expected to be respected by the May Fourth demonstrators. While the "stiff upper lip" or "Western values" mentalities were perceived as positive characteristics among British expatriates, and to some extent among the Chinese intelligentsia, the Chinese "face pidgin" disposition was seen as a weakness from the British perspective.

Already in the summer of 1919, the students had addressed a letter to the Council, indicating their earnest desire to help "our foreign friends" in the treaty-port areas, and they attempted to assure British officials of their ability to guarantee peace and order in the region. Combined with this message, the students appointed a special committee to promote understanding between May Fourth demonstrators and foreigners. Even before launching the general strike, the Chinese Citizens' Society had issued an explanatory letter to several foreign officials. It articulated the objectives of boycotting Japanese products, and moreover it promised to advise all Chinese to purchase their goods only from British and American shops. This rhetoric, which overwhelmingly praised foreigners, was put forth in notices issued by Chinese student, merchant, and educational organisations. A substantial number of these texts complimented the whole foreign community's sympathy and goodwill towards the Movement. Brief references were made to the exceptional organisational skills of the May Fourth demonstrators to maintain order during the strikes. (*North China Herald* June 1919) Despite skilfully constructed discourse on "Western friends", the notices were in fact used as instruments for the May Fourth activists to garner common acceptance among foreigners and Chinese.

In another message, the British were reminded in a highly articulate manner of their position as guardians of the Chinese Maritime Customs and as administrators of many foreign settlements in the country.[10] Overall, along with these concessions, they had responsibilities towards the whole country. According to this hypothesis, by supporting the Chinese nation against imperialist Japan, the British would guarantee in the future the continuation of their privileged presence in China. This was an obvious indication that the British imperial hegemony was accepted and even supported by the Chinese activists. As one May Fourth pamphlet indicated, the only way for the British to maintain a powerful hegemony was to help the demonstrators in their operations against Japanese aggression. In another, it was implied that the Japanese would simply remove the British from the treaty ports. (Shanghai Municipal Archives 1919, U1-91-19, Shanghai Municipal Police)

The May Fourth students claimed that they were fighting for foreigners in China. Their messages repeated the rhetoric of the Western principle of the democratic right to protest when encountering imperialist aggression. Their notices implied that the Japanese, not the Chinese, were hostile agents and were gradually forcing the British out of the treaty ports in order to openly practise militarist politics in China. By including in the letters a goal of co-operation to resist Japanese aggression, the May Fourth demonstrators sought to establish a high level of co-existence and shared values and interdependence – both perceived and actual – between the British and Chinese. It seems as if the British and the May Fourth activists' collaboration to fight against a mutual enemy was a fundamental requirement in these political and financial contexts. Another point to stress is that the demonstrators' discourse repeatedly expressed well-known Western values such as democracy, free trade, nationalism, liberalism, general education, and women's emancipation. Underlying this reasoning was the idea that the British would understand and support a movement which represented modern ideologies similar to their own. (Schwarcz 1986: 94–144)

In the summer of 1919, the Shanghai Municipal Council issued various notifications to restrict the May Fourth activities, and finally it closed the students' office in the Settlement. Apart from losing this perfect site for their headquarters, the May Fourth activists' operations did not seem to be greatly affected by the Council's notifications. The Council's first order to not interfere

10 Until 1912, the Chinese Maritime Customs (1854–1949) was called the Imperial Maritime Customs Service. It was a Chinese governmental tax collection agency and information service predominantly controlled by the British.

with shopkeepers' businesses was ignored by the student and merchant inspector corps and the "groups of ten", who investigated business premises in order to find prohibited Japanese products. A second notification called for an end to the distribution of potentially inciting printed materials, but stemming the constant flow of such propaganda proved unmanageable. The Shanghai Municipal Police reported that it consisted of over 500 different kinds of handbills and cartoons. Other than preventing some parades, the third notification to stop rumours and crowd gatherings was also fairly ineffective. The rush gained from political and social agitation was thrilling, and it was impossible to prevent people from gathering together to exchange stories and experiences and predictions of future events. In reality, since the strikes had closed schools, shops, and factories, people had nothing else to do except to meet on the streets and talk about the situation. Increasing numbers of people crowded the streets to listen to speakers on the corners. (Shanghai Municipal Archives 1920, Shanghai Municipal Council, Annual Report 1919: 88A)

Printed materials that were produced for foreigners were compiled skilfully, while visual images were designed to support the Movement's nationalist ideology. Modern styles and accurate analyses expressed through Western models demonstrated the May Fourth protagonists' abilities to produce rational and intelligent ideas. This created some unease among foreign circles and gave an extra impetus for British authorities to suppress the Movement as soon as possible. (Shanghai Municipal Archives 1920, U1-3-1, Minutes of Shanghai Municipal Council) The May Fourth activists represented a modern, active, and educated new Chinese generation that could easily contest British imperial privileges and rights. By using their position, Chinese scholars were able to bring considerable pressure to bear on more reluctant patriots, such as workers or merchants. It was still possible to leverage the traditional Chinese respect for scholars, and the recent general strike had shown the scholars' potential to unify all classes in support of the Movement.

In a contrast of style, in May Fourth propaganda disseminated among Chinese inhabitants, short sentences and vernacular language were used to promote ideas. Easily memorable phrases were repeated in order to underline the principles of the Movement: "Down with militarists", "China belongs to Chinese", and "Boycott Japanese goods" were some of the popular slogans used to deliver their message. (Shanghai Municipal Archives 1919, U1-91-19, Shanghai Municipal Police; Smith 2002: 92–108) The difference between the rhetoric addressed to foreigners and Chinese intelligentsia on one hand and common Chinese people on the other was massive. The former groups clearly needed more "eloquent argumentation". Accordingly, May Fourth propaganda reflected different target audiences.

Side by side with this rhetorical co-operation with the British, Western-educated students comprised a critical faction of the Chinese intellectuals who had already begun to criticise British hegemony in the country. Hence, the first attempts to contest Britain's semi-colonial presence were expressed during the May Fourth Movement. Western-style pamphlets were drafted and political meetings were held to support the right to pursue Chinese national independence and to organise popular movements to implement it. (Students' Movement. *China Press* 13 July 1919: 2)

The Chinese May Fourth rhetoric on nationalism was established first and foremost to advocate the Chinese constituency and, secondly, to convince Westerners of their ideological seriousness. Given the remarkably broad level of participation in the Movement, it is unreasonable to assume that the actors were all inspired by a single ideology. For foreigners, directed manifestos and concepts were adopted from socialism, anarchism, Darwinism, Marxism,

Communism, Bolshevism, and liberalism. These ideologies, being reasonably new in China, were frequently expressed in conjunction with the rejection of traditional Chinese values. (Chen 1922: 648–649; Hu Shih 1934) It is indisputable that the May Fourth rhetoric contained contradictory elements. On one hand, it provoked a profound critique of traditional Chinese culture, while on the other hand it advocated radical Chinese nationalism. In addition, Western modernism was admired. This was interpreted as a conflict between external imperatives of "national salvation" (*jiuguo*) and internal prerequisites of "enlightenment" (*qimeng*) (Schwarcz 1986: 1–10). As the students asserted:

> We, as students, would never be able, would never dare to assert that we had reached enlightenment, that we are, ourselves, enlightened enough. We have, however, made up our minds to search for enlightenment. We hope that other people in our society will also become determined to march toward enlightenment. (Schwarcz 1986: 137)

At that time, Chinese modernisation was believed to be achievable through the adoption of particular Western doctrines. Yet, an anti-imperialist feeling was already condemning Japanese politics, and the Versailles Peace Treaty had undoubtedly increased reservations towards Westerners' policies in China. However contradictory the objectives were, the radical nationalism urgently demanded change. The strong articulation of these ideals for the foreign audience had a profound impact on the development of May Fourth ideologies. In many cases, Chinese intellectuals – which included both students and teachers – were the major advocates of the May Fourth ideas to foreigners. This May Fourth discourse dominated intellectual discussions during the Movement.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that Chinese nationalism was reflected in the various representations of the May Fourth Movement that displayed concerns for the linked themes of internal unification, international position, and a common Chinese culture. Obviously the participants sought to portray the Movement as nationalist, since demonstrations and strikes were often directed against the forces of imperialism. Presumably, this also had to do with attempts of the Communist Party and the nationalist Guomindang to strengthen the image of "the nationalistic spirit" of the Movement in later narrations that were used for their own purposes. Indeed, the May Fourth Movement comprised part of the political ceremonies and symbols related to China's national awakening and identity building.

The British discourse constructed during the May Fourth Movement created and responded to a reality that was infinitely adaptable in its functions of preserving the basic structures of imperial power. The sudden rise of Chinese radical nationalism was indeed a serious threat to foreign, and particularly British, hegemony and imperialism in the treaty ports and the whole of China. For the British, the May Fourth demonstrators represented a potential change in the existing intellectual, political, social, and economic stability, which for decades had guaranteed the British a privileged position in the country.

The ideas which the May Fourth Movement communicated to students were also evident among the Chinese bourgeoisie or the new urban elite, including merchants and businessmen. In the form of street and labour unions, their ideas also became accessible to workers in the factories. In addition to growing class distinctions during the May Fourth Movement, the greatest threat for the British municipal authorities was the May Fourth demonstrators' ability to agitate

political consciousness among classes that had been traditionally excluded from power and, therefore, had usually been reluctant to join mass movements.

Moreover, the critical faction of the Chinese population – which included groups of students and intellectuals, but increasingly also sections of the bourgeoisie and workers – had started to analyse British hegemony in the country. Overall, new Chinese organisations reinterpreted the emerging resistance against domestic and foreign oppression in China, and during the life of the May Fourth Movement these groups expressed initial attempts to challenge the British semi-colonial presence. As local newspaper reports revealed, for example, the press licence discussion prompted Chinese Western-educated students to accuse the entire law of being manufactured and implemented by the British in order to check growing Chinese public opinion. In addition, Westerners' unfulfilled promises of treaty revisions provided a strong impetus for the rise of radical nationalism among the Chinese. The British inflexible policies towards the May Fourth Movement were partially responsible for the modern and radical fringe's initial questioning of the Western, and particularly the British, position in China.

At that time, the May Fourth protestors, especially urban and educated men, dominated public articulations of national identities. With their control of knowledge production, and in some cases control of state bureaucracies, the cultural elite were able to make demands for the nation, often combining their own group needs with particular definitions of the nation itself. The Chinese search for equality in foreign relations was humiliatingly rejected during the Versailles Peace Treaty. Furthermore, humiliation and degradation of the country profoundly and specifically affected the students. For Chinese nationalists, the May Fourth Movement provided, at least to some extent, an opportunity to express patriotism towards their home country in foreign enclaves beyond the immediate reach of the Chinese government. It is apparent, therefore, that the successful May Fourth boycotts and strikes initiated permanent expansions in participation and provided the instruments for implementing radical activism that would be required for later movements.

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