

Reconstructing “May Fourth”:

The Role of Communication, Propaganda, and
International Actors

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Abstract

On June 25th, 2019, the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) celebrated the inauguration of its centre facilities with an international audience of academic researchers, artists and politicians. On 26th June, the workshop “China and the World, the World and China, Second CATS Open Forum” took place in the main hall of the centre. The workshop, which was part of the inauguration celebration, was dedicated to Senior Professor Rudolf G. Wagner, former Director of the Centre

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for East Asian Studies and the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context,” for his life time commitment and extraordinary contribution to the fields of Sinology and Transcultural Studies. While the workshop included several sessions throughout the day, this contribution will focus solely on Professor Wagner’s lively and unravelling talk about the May Fourth Movement in China.

The talk was presented under the title: “Reconstructing ‘May Fourth’: The Role of Communication, Propaganda, and International Actors” and is a rework of Professor Wagner’s speech delivered at the “May Fourth Conference” at Harvard University, USA, in April, 2019. The first section examines the May Fourth Movement as a carefully planned event by its Chinese and foreign protagonists; the second section challenges the popular definition on the movement’s significance as the “Chinese Renaissance;” section three expands on these arguments by presenting evidence for Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Kuomintang (KMT) manipulation of the May Fourth legacy in order to satisfy their own propagandistic needs; the fourth section summarizes the main arguments of the essay and introduces the international actors who participated in the event. This essay explains, with the use of archival evidence, how this group of actors helped shape the history of China from the signing of the ‘Twenty-One Demands’, to the recovery of Shandong at the Washington Naval Conference in 1921-1922.

The text identifies that the movement “consciously acted as part of an international political ideological current” and “compensated for a strong asymmetry in the available means of communication, information, and propaganda compared to Japan and the Western powers.”

Keywords: May Fourth Movement, international actors, propaganda,
May Fourth legacy, Chinese history

重構「五四」：

傳播、宣傳與國際行動者的作用

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摘要

2019年6月25日，眾多國際學術研究人員、藝術家與政治家一同慶祝了海德堡亞洲與跨文化研究中心（CATS）的落成典禮。6月26日，研討會「中國與世界、世界與中國，亞洲與跨文化研究中心第二次公開論壇」在該中心主廳舉行。作為CATS落成典禮慶祝活動的一部分，該會獻給資深教授魯道夫·G·瓦格納，感謝其一生對漢學及跨文化研究領域所做奉獻及傑出貢獻。瓦格納教授曾擔任東亞研究中心及菁英集群「全球語境下的亞洲與歐洲」主任。研討會全天包含多個論題，但本文將僅體現瓦格納教授關於中國「五四」運動的生動活

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潑、由淺入深的演講。

該演講題為：「重構『五四』：傳播、宣傳與國際行動者的作用」，改編自瓦格納教授在2019年4月12-13日於美國哈佛大學“May Fourth @ 100: China and the World”（五四@100：中國與世界）國際研討會上的主題演講。第一節分析了「五四」的性質，揭示了該運動其實是由中國及外國主導者共同精心策劃的事件；第二節挑戰了當前對該運動重要性的通行定義——認為其是「中國的文藝復興」；第三部分對前兩部分展開討論，提供相關證據表明中國共產黨（CCP）與國民黨（KMT）都通過操控「五四」遺產滿足了其自身的宣傳目的；第四部分總結了本文的主要論點，並介紹了參與此事件的國際行動者。同時，通過利用歷史檔案解釋了從「二十一條」的簽訂到1921至1922年華盛頓海軍會議上歸還山東半島主權，這些國際行動者是如何幫助塑造中國歷史的。

本文證明「五四」運動，「對於自身作為國際政治思想潮流的一部分具有相當的自覺」，而得以「平衡／彌補在與日本及西方相較下，於可使用的溝通、信息與宣傳手段上的懸殊差距」。

關鍵詞：「五四」運動、國際行動者、宣傳、「五四」遺產、中國歷史

Reconstructing “May Fourth”:

The Role of Communication, Propaganda, and International Actors

**Rudolf. G. Wagner
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On June 25th, 2019, the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) celebrated the inauguration of its centre facilities with an international audience of academic researchers, artists and politicians. The centre comprises the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS), the Institute of Anthropology (IfE), the South Asia Institute (SAI), and the Centre for East Asian Studies (ZO). The Centre’s focus lies on conducting Asian and Transcultural Studies in a global context through driving an interdisciplinary dialogue.

On 26th June, the workshop “China and the World, the World and China, Second CATS Open Forum” took place in the main hall of the centre. The workshop, which was part of the inauguration celebration, was dedicated to Senior Professor Rudolf G. Wagner, former Director of the Centre for East Asian Studies and the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context,” for his life time commitment and

extraordinary contribution to the fields of Sinology and Transcultural Studies. While the workshop included several sessions throughout the day, this contribution will focus solely on Professor Wagner's lively and unravelling talk about the May Fourth Movement in China.

The talk was presented under the title: "Reconstructing 'May Fourth': The Role of Communication, Propaganda, and International Actors" and is a rework of Prof. Wagner's speech delivered at the "May Fourth Conference" at Harvard University, USA, in April, 2019.

The following text is organized and restructured into four sections based on the speech draft provided by Professor Wagner and refined with his kind suggestions. The first section examines the May Fourth Movement as a carefully planned event by its Chinese and foreign protagonists; the second section challenges the popular definition on the movement's significance as the "Chinese renaissance;" section three expands on these arguments by presenting evidence for Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and *Kuomintang* (KMT) manipulation of the May Fourth legacy in order to satisfy their own propagandistic needs; the fourth section summarizes the main arguments of the essay and introduces the international actors who participated in the event. This essay explains, with the use of archival evidence, how this group of actors helped shape the history of China from the signing of the "Twenty-One Demands" to the recovery of Shandong at the Washington Naval Conference in 1921-1922.

1. The May Fourth Movement is a Planned Event.

The May Fourth Movement's major claim was a push for sovereignty. It is a sensitive issue as Shandong had been taken by the Japanese from the German in 1915, before the Chinese government itself could recuperate it.

Chinese activists were quite aware and informed about similar movements of sovereignty elsewhere, providing them with a fair number of movement models to borrow from, such as the Korean movement for independence. In this case, Korea was asking for independence from Japan while seeking help from the American president Wilson to achieve this goal. The Korean March First movement, Wagner said, was “called forth by the frustration over the failure of the Paris Peace Conference to enact Wilsonian¹ principles and return Korea to independence.”² Similarly, the May Fourth’s demonstration was “addressed not to the government, but to the public and foreign legations directly,”³ especially the United States. During and after the Korean movement, Chinese media, including the *Beijing Morning Post*, closely followed every aspect of the movement, providing the students in China with specific guidelines on how to act in a “movement.”

Between 1915 and 1916, the journal *New Youth* reported with enthusiasm about the Young Germany Association (*Jung Deutschland*) which, with its “stress on patriotism, education, and physical training, envisaged Germany as the rising new power, symbolizing the replacement of the old by the new.”⁴ This movement was therefore highly admired by Chinese youth. Especially the passionately ongoing Korean revolution imposed a sort of anxiety on the young Chinese protagonists that “China was about to miss the next train and trend,” and that China must catch up

¹ Thomas Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924). He served as the 28th president of the United States from 1913 to 1921.

² Rudolf G. Wagner, “The Canonization of May Fourth,” in *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China’s May Fourth Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 89.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from Professor Wagner’s talk in the CATS’ workshop.

⁴ Wagner, “The Canonization of May Fourth.”

with a movement of their own.

May Fourth was not a random occurrence of protest. We can only recognize in hindsight that it was in fact a carefully planned event which epitomized previous developments and had a lasting impact. On May third, one day before the movement, Zhang Guotao⁵ announced “Tomorrow is a mass movement” (*Mingtian you qunzhong yundong* 明天有群眾運動). The date was set as a direct rejection of the May Ninth “National Shame Day” which the *Jinbudang* 進步黨 (Progress Party) of Liang Qichao⁶ had established in 1915. On the “National Shame Day,” China had accepted most of Japan’s “Twenty-One Demands.” The rejection stated the May Fourth leaders’ denial of their focus on the “National Shame.” At the same time, “*qunzhong yundong*” stated the movement leaders’ intention of starting a mass movement — a non-political party or state government involved event. Only a week after the movement, the protagonists had already given it a “spirit” (*jingshen* 精神). Two weeks later, they defined it as a major turning point in modern Chinese history, more significant than the Republican Revolution of 1911; by refusing to date the movement within the Republican calendar and going straight for western dating of 1919.

2. The Western Origin of “New Culture”

Since the 1920s until very recently, the May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement have been treated as turning points in the political and cultural realm. The movement was claimed to be a “Chinese

⁵ Zhang Guotao (張國燾; 1897-1979), was a founding member and important leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

⁶ Liang Qichao (梁啟超; 1873-1929), also known as Liang Ch’i-Ch’ao, was a Chinese historian, journalist, philosopher, and politician who lived during the late Qing dynasty and the early Republic of China.

Enlightenment” for the masses; and the “New Culture” was equaled to a Chinese renaissance. In 1918, “Renaissance” became the English title of the New Culture journal *Xinchao* 《新潮》 (*The Renaissance*). In 1933, Hu Shih⁷ described the “New Culture” in his book *The Chinese Renaissance* as follows: “Slowly, quietly, but unmistakably, the Chinese Renaissance is becoming a reality;” and he continued, “the product of this rebirth looks suspiciously occidental; but, scratch its surface and you will find that the stuff of which it is made is essentially Chinese bedrock, which much weathering and corrosion have only made stand out more clearly the humanistic and rationalist China resurrected by the touch of the scientific and democratic.”

However, a close look at this “essentially Chinese bedrock” and the “masses” who were enlightened is in place. After signing the Twenty-One Demands, Chen Duxiu⁸ proclaimed that the shame could not be washed away by the combined waters of the Yangzi and Yellow River. He accused the Chinese citizenry of being weak and obedient. As Wagner pointed out “The factual mental state of the citizenry is thought to be one of narrow self-interest, disregard for the interests of the nation, spiritual weakness, and meek obedience.”⁹ Because “the Confucian theory of the three relationships (*san gang* 三綱),” makes the people an appendage of the Ruler without any freedom and self-mastery.¹⁰ “Therefore, the young Chinese should renew their ‘heart blood’ through putting themselves into

⁷ Hu Shih (胡適; 1891-1962), was a Chinese philosopher, essayist and diplomat.

⁸ Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀; 1879-1942), was a Chinese revolutionary socialist who co-founded the Chinese Communist Party (with Li Dazhao) in 1921, serving from 1921 to 1927 as its first General Secretary.

⁹ Wagner, “The Canonization of May Fourth,” 80.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

the position of conqueror not the conquered, emulating independence and self-mastery and pursuing ‘citizen movements’ so as to renovate the human character of the Chinese, the state, society, the family, and the nation. And this movement should grow through the guidance of an educated, progressive, and informed elite.”¹¹ This elite was to be the young intelligentsia addressed in the *New Youth*, *New Tide*, *Weekly Review* (*Meizhou pinglun* 《每周評論》), and other similar journals. “The elitism was political in that the activists thus staked a claim to be the legitimate purveyors...the orientation could be articulated and lived only within a modern and essentially Westernized cultural environment.”¹²

Evidently, the so-called “Chinese bedrock” was in fact piled on Western ideologies; and Hu’s advocate of “new culture,” that promoted “democracy and science,” was sourced from the playbook of Hu Shih’s teacher, John Dewey,¹³ at Columbia University, USA. Hu said that the May Fourth culture looked occidental. The Chinese writer Li Changzhi¹⁴ built on this statement in the 1940s and proclaimed that May Fourth culture “was not just ‘western,’ but was a second-rate imitation without cultural substance whatsoever. To call that a Renaissance was utterly overblown.” He suggested that it was much closer to a shallow “enlightenment,” which resonated with another May Fourth protagonist, Luo Jialun¹⁵.

The new culture that was supposed to renovate the Chinese mentality

¹¹ Ibid., 80.

¹² Ibid., 96.

¹³ John Dewey (1859-1952), was an American philosopher and educational reformer.

¹⁴ Changzhi Li (李長之; 1910-1978), was a Chinese writer and philosopher. He worked as a professor in Beijing Normal University.

¹⁵ Luo Jialun (羅家倫; 1897-1969), was Chinese Minister of Education, historian, diplomat and political activist.

and to define the conceptual framework of May Fourth Culture was published and printed by the Commercial Press in *Xin wenhua cishu* 《新文化辭書》 (*Terminological Handbook of New Culture*) in 1923. The first 900-page edition of this work was circulating until the early 1940s. When exploring the meaning of the “new culture” defined by the *Xin wenhua cishu*, it is curious to find that all the entries are Western terms arranged according to the Western alphabet, followed by the Chinese and other European language translations.

Paradoxical to the statement of “Chinese bedrock,” “nothing Chinese in the book qualifies for being a part of ‘new culture.’ No Chinese person, event, intellectual current or philosophical proposition was listed in this book.” Thus, according to the understanding of the time, the official definition of “new culture” was unarguably Western.

3. The May Fourth Legacy

The political agenda of the May Fourth movement is defined by two core elements: sovereignty as a principle and the rejection of Japan’s takeover of the Shandong concession as a specific policy. The movement was intended to link up with the protest against the Chinese government’s handling of the Twenty-One Demands. In late 1918, three years after Japan took the Shandong Concession, the Peking government signed a treaty with Japan which confirmed the contested validity of the agreement on the Twenty-One Demands. The government, with some of the same persons who signed the Demands including Cao Rulin,¹⁶ was thus suspected of

¹⁶ Cao Rulin (曹汝霖; 1877-1966) was Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Beiyang Government and an important member of the pro-Japanese movement in the early 20th century.

going to sign the Paris Agreement and sell China's sovereignty to Japan again. The strong claim to the Chinese sovereignty then manifested in the form of the May Fourth protest.

The movement refused to be a state-controlled event involving political parties. It was led by students, intellectuals and social elites who largely located their ideologue with Wilsonism, which is marked by self-independence and democracy, culminating in the abolition of superstition and a revision of Confucian values. With neither the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) nor the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) fully controlling China's political power, and with the May Fourth leaders aggressively promoting the ideologue, the movement eventually received tacit consent from both parties.

However, in the post May Fourth time, the two parties fought to claim the movement's legacy. The KMT identified the movement as "an extremist movement damaging the cultural and value continuity of China." While in the "On New Democracy 論新民主義," of Mao Zedong,¹⁷ Mao depicted the spirit of independent action and organization as "the movement's liberal and essentially bourgeois weakness;" the movement was 'the intellectuals' subordination to the CCP.'" A few years later, Mao added to his theory that the intellectual's subordination to the CCP was due to the fact that the party "represented the best interests of the people."¹⁸

¹⁷ Mao Zedong (毛澤東; 1893-1976), also known as Chairman Mao, was a Chinese communist revolutionary who became the founding father of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

¹⁸ Wagner, "The Canonization of May Fourth," 113.

4. International Actors and their Involvement in the May Fourth Movement

(1) A Multilateral Cooperation to Divulge Japan’s Demands

In 1915, under stern order, the Chinese government agreed with Japan that the signing of the Twenty-One Demands ought to be carried out in secrecy so as to prevent potential social opposition. However, some members of the Chinese government shared an understanding with their Western peers that the only way to accomplish the signing of the document was to make it public through media. They believed that the publication of Japan’s ambition of devouring Shandong and consequential violation of Chinese sovereignty was going to inspire widespread objections among the international spectators.

Follow this, word of the planned signing was initiated. Chow Tzu-chi,¹⁹ the special envoy of President Yuan Shikai²⁰ to Japan, sent a telegram to William Henry Donald,²¹ who was an Australian journalist based in Shanghai. In the telegram, Chow called Donald to Beijing, “Chaos. Come to Peking straight away.” Before the meeting with Chow, Donald consulted with Roy Scott Anderson,²² who was an expert in Chinese politics. Anderson told Donald that the telegram might be about Japan, but had no details to offer. With the information from Anderson,

¹⁹ Chow Tzu-ch’i (or Zhou Ziqi, 周自齊; 1869-1923) was a Chinese educator and politician in the late Qing dynasty and early republican period.

²⁰ Yuan Shikai (袁世凱; 1859-1916) was a Chinese military and government official who rose to power during the late Qing dynasty.

²¹ William Henry Donald (1875-1946) was an Australian newspaperman who worked in China from 1903 until World War II.

²² Roy Scott Anderson (1883-1925) was an American diplomat, served as *general* in Sun Yat-sen’s army and helped to bring about the fall of the Manchus.

Donald drafted a list with Japan's possible demands and refined it with Chow's hints after the meeting.

However, Japan was strong enough to block the publication of Donald's list. Since the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1902 and the exclusion of German media after the WWI, the world's major news agencies, namely British Reuters, Japanese Kokusai and French Havas were nearly all under Japanese control. Kokusai, the Japanese state agency, and Reuters came to an agreement that all East Asian news ought to be collected by Kokusai and distributed by Reuters. The Chinese newspaper *Shenbao*, which was located in Shanghai, has subscribed to the Reuters. In addition to Japan's media monopoly, some American officials sided with Japan. Therefore, and not surprisingly, the publication of the list of possible Japanese demands in major newspapers, such as *Washington Post* or the *New York Times*, was suppressed. The newspapers confirmed with their foreign offices and the local Japanese embassies that there was no evidence to support Donald's assumption and that the list was merely an invented lie against Japan.

Yet, concrete evidence to the contrary was soon leaked by different foreign personnel from different countries' government agencies. George Morrison,²³ who worked in the Chinese Foreign Office as a translator, went out of a meeting with Donald and left for him the official internal translation of the Twenty-One Demands on the table. This informal disclosure had in fact been sanctioned by someone in the Chinese Foreign Office and the US ambassador to China, Paul Samuel Reinsch²⁴. With the

²³ George Ernest Morrison (1862-1920) was an Australian journalist, political adviser to and representative of the government of the Republic of China during the First World War.

²⁴ Paul Samuel Reinsch (1869-1923), was an American political scientist and diplomat.

confidential document as evidence, the *Chicago Daily News* published Donald’s list, and *Washington Post* republished it. When the news reached China through the *Washington Post* correspondent in China, it was published by the *North China Herald* in English and translated into Chinese by *Shenbao* in Shanghai. The news stories criticized the Japanese demands, especially the humiliating terms laid out in the “Fifth Group.” However, they also remained critical of China’s autonomous handling of this issue and insisted on foreign intervention. Nearly simultaneously, Carl Crow²⁵ also obtained a confidential document containing the Japan’s demands on China from the Czar’s Ambassador in Tokyo, and he published it through *United Press International*. The publication of this information through international media sparked a surge of public opinion against the Japanese demands. Many foreigners who were committed to safeguarding Chinese sovereignty, including US ambassador Reinsch, described the resistance to the Twenty-One Demands as a sacred duty. Their opinions were printed in the American press and were reprinted in both English and Chinese in other international newspapers. These public perspectives provided “legitimacy and standing to Chinese inside and outside government who opposed President Yuan Shihkai’s willingness to sign off on the Japanese demands.” Eventually, Donald was asked to draft China’s reply to the Twenty-One Demands, and he did it without including the “Fifth Group.” The draft was then accepted by the Japanese.

The propagandistic messages popularized by international media imposed a lot of pressure on Japan and became a decisive factor in the settlement of the final agreement. Thereby the foreign protagonists,

²⁵ Carl Crow (1884-1945) was an American newspaperman, businessman, and author who managed several newspapers and then opened the first Western advertising agency in Shanghai, China.

who were contributing to the media propaganda during the period of negotiation, played a crucial role in ensuring China's continued sovereignty.

(2) Popularizing Wilsonism, the Ideologue of May Fourth Movement

Wilson won his re-election in 1916 with a promise of keeping the United States out of WWI. Only a year later, in 1917, he changed his opinion when Germany sank several American passenger ships, claiming that they were shipping war material. However, with a strong opposition in the American public, which urged to avoid the huge sacrifice of human lives and costs associated with a participation in WWI, and with further objections from the local ethnic and pro-German groups and under the influence of German propaganda, the Wilson government was urgently in need of publicity and propaganda that could convince the US citizens to support the war.

Based on the understanding of the theory of Gustave Le Bon²⁶ on the "masses" and their "collective irrationality," which was outlined in 1895, the American government believed that it was righteous and positive for government to use propaganda in order to organize and persuade its citizens into joining the war. Wilson, realizing the necessity of adapting to the changing world media environment, where news agencies and dailies provided real time news to the public through cables and wireless technology, in 1917, only a week after the United States entered the war, set up America's propaganda office, the Committee on Public Information.

²⁶ Charles-Marie Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) was a leading French polymath. He is best known for his 1895 work *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*.

The agency prioritized to target the domestic audience in the United States and other Western spectators. As Japanese media dominated public opinion about East Asian affairs and often referred to China as the “dwarves from the East,” introducing different voices about China into the international focus was necessary to secure China’s positive image. The US ambassador Reinsch was pushing to establish a China branch of the Committee on Public Information, but his enthusiasm could not win the Wilson government’s support. Acting on his own, Reinsch organized Chinese translators to deliver Wilson’s speeches and translation of war news from English to Chinese. And in 1918, a China branch of the Committee was eventually set up with the effort of Reinsch and Charles Crane,²⁷ and was run by Carl Crow. Besides the persons introduced, the branch had its core support from a group of foreign protagonists, including George Sokolsky,²⁸ an American journalist located in China and Japan.

The agency established direct wireless links with the United States and had the American perspective on the war quickly available in China. It placed Wilson’s pictures, slogans and adverts with Chinese translation all over China. Besides, the Committee collected a list of around 25000 Chinese opinion leaders’ names and distributed Wilson’s speeches among them. It “firmly established the notion of China’s right to this modern notion of ‘sovereignty’” among the May Fourth protagonists, and marked a breakthrough in adopting personalized propaganda in China. The history about the branch has been documented in Hans Schmidt’s 1998 paper “Democracy for China: American Propaganda and the May Fourth

²⁷ Charles Richard Crane (1858-1939) was a wealthy American businessman, heir to a large industrial fortune and connoisseur of Arab culture, a noted Arabist.

²⁸ George Ephraim Sokolsky (1893-1962) was a weekly radio broadcaster for the National Association of Manufacturers and a columnist for *The New York Herald Tribune*. He was also an expert on China.

Movement.”²⁹ Besides China, the American propaganda also “awakened the hopes for resistance and independence movements worldwide” as elaborated by Erez Manela³⁰ in his book *Wilsonian Moment*.

Besides the promotion of Wilsonian ideal in China, the foreigners in China provided professional support to assist the May Fourth protagonists’ influence on Chinese and international media and ensured the transparency of information among the Chinese spectators. Roy Scott Anderson, who was keen on ensuring China’s sovereignty, frequently published opinions under the name Bruce Baxter in the *North China Daily News*, including advising strategies against signing the Paris Agreement. When Japan blocked the cable services between Peking and Shanghai, the US embassy used its wire to transmit news about the Peking demonstrations to Shanghai, which effectively “expanded the geographic, social and political reach and impact of the movement.” In the very morning of the May Fourth Movement, the student leaders came to the US embassy in Peking for Reinsch’s advice. Although, unfortunately, he was not in Peking at that moment. However, a few days after the movement, Reinsch actively pressed the Peking government on releasing the arrested students; his embassy and himself helped transport Chiang Monlin,³¹ an active guide of the movement and a team member of Reinsch, to Shanghai. In 1919, to overcome Japan’s dominance of news report, George Sokolsky set up the Bureau of Public Information in Shanghai, and he invited Hu

²⁹ Hans Schmidt, “Democracy for China: American Propaganda and the May Fourth Movement,” *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 1 (1998): 1-28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24913719>.

³⁰ Erez Manela: professor of history at Harvard University

³¹ Jiang Menglin (or Chiang Monlin, 蔣夢麟; 1886-1964), was a Chinese educator, writer, and politician. Between 1919 and 1927, he served as the President of Peking University, later became the president of National Chekiang University.

Shih, who was an intellectual leader of the movement, to be a member of the advisory board of the Bureau. The board attracted student leaders, educators, bankers and people from commerce. Most of the members were involved in the May Fourth Movement, in particular, Sokolsky and Hu, who later shared a very close friendship.

In 1928, Sokolsky published his *Outline of Universal History*. He sent each chapter to Hu for comments and suggestions. In response, Hu wrote a preface to the book in which he praised especially the last chapter on China’s recent history, “a story which for comprehensiveness and sympathetic understanding probably surpasses anything ever written on the subject.” Sokolsky’s last chapter provided precious source material to the section “International actors and their involvement in the May Fourth Movement” in the thesis, except the last event “Staying on Course,” as it occurred after the publication of the book.

As a significant figure involved in China’s modern history, Sokolsky showed a “strong commitment to China’s sovereignty and deep contacts into especially Shanghai business and educational circles.” However, his role during the Republican period remained unstudied, Wagner said “in part because his archive at the Hoover Center remained closed, but mostly because his career as a right-wing anti-communist commentator during the McCarthy era made him a very appalling subject of research for the generation of scholars entering the China field in the post-Vietnam War era.”

Upheld by a strong commitment to China’s sovereignty and critical attitude towards Japan, the foreign protagonists literally configured a “Betterment of China group.” With the Chinese protagonists, they shared political ideologue, trust, mentorship and friendship before, during and after the May Fourth Movement and “acted like a transnational non-governmental organization that upheld Wilsonian ideals without feeling

bound by the vicissitudes of US politics.”

(3) The Formation of International Banking Consortium in 1920

After the United States' withdrawal from the International Financial Consortium, that was established in 1908, the Wilson administration decided to form a new bank consortium in 1916. The new consortium held the purpose of “assisting China in the development of her public enterprises,”³² hoping to prevent privileged treatment in regards to granting of international loans, especially when Japan could use these resources for actions against China. However, among the thirty-seven member states, Japan alone insisted on excluding Manchuria and Mongolia as a precondition for joining the Consortium in order to protect its interests there. The Chairman, Thomas Lamont,³³ was therefore assigned to visit East Asia to convince the Japanese to join the Consortium, which would prevent the Japanese government from making individual loans to Chinese politicians and warlords in return for privileges. But his trip soon had another agenda. The Chinese believed that the new policy would eliminate China's financial sovereignty. It would need credits to finance the demobilization of the warlord's troops, but Consortium credits were only to be given for infrastructure investments. So, Lamont had to persuade the Chinese that the new consortium would be in China's best interest.

According to the Lamont Archive at Harvard University, he corresponded with Millard,³⁴ Anderson and Crow on possibilities to

³² “The Financial Consortium in China,” *Bulletin of International News* 3, no. 5 (1927): 4-7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25638241>.

³³ Thomas William Lamont, Jr. (1870-1948) was an American banker.

³⁴ Thomas Franklin Fairfax Millard (1868-1942) was an American journalist, founder of the *China Weekly Review* and the first American political adviser to the Chinese Republic. Millard was known as “the founding father of American

resolve the issue. In the meantime, through his personal connections to East Asia and with the help from Sokolsky, Lamont met with a broad spectrum of political forces, from Sun Yat-sen³⁵ to various warlords, bankers and the student federation. With suspicions that the Consortium was to conspire against China and facilitate Japan’s share of China’s finances, the students strongly opposed the idea. There was even a rumor that the students would attack Lamont’s hotel. As a skillful diplomat, Lamont received thirty student representatives with his wife in their hotel in Shanghai. After over two hours of conversation, Lamont was able to convince them with concrete ideas. First of all, Japan’s participation in the Consortium would restrict its financing of government figures through the ruling of the multinational group forming the consortium, which would be in China’s interest; secondly, the Consortium would support China’s structural development. It would ensure that the loans granted to the government would only be used for well-planned infrastructure projects, that could not be completed with private funds. However, the finances needed could only be raised when the member states sold bonds to buyers in the international market. Thus, a secured guarantee to the buyers was necessary and the Consortium would embody such a guarantee.

After managing to convince Japan to join the Consortium without pre-conditions, Lamont received thankful letters and invitations for speeches from Chinese Student Unions at various American universities. A few months later, Lamont and a few bankers from the Consortium joined Crane’s program as the Red Cross American Committee for China

journalism in China”, and “the dean of American newspapermen in the Orient”.
³⁵ Sun Yat-sen (孫中山; 1866-1925) was a Chinese philosopher, physician, and politician, who served as the provisional first president of the Republic of China and the first leader of the *Kuomintang* (Nationalist Party of China).

Famine Relief.³⁶

It seems that Lamont's conversation with the students was not only a diplomatic triumph, but an influential message to the Peking Government. Following his visit, the Chinese government released "some arrested students" involved in the May Fourth Movement.

(4) The United States Derailed the Ratification of the Versailles Treaty

Relying on the documentation provided in the doctoral thesis of Mordechai Rozanski,³⁷ prepared at the University of Pennsylvania in 1974, and the archive-based research done by Penny Kane and Jerome A. Cohen, only two years after the May Fourth Movement, the Shandong issue appeared to be discarded by the Chinese people and press. Public interests now swirled to questions such as sexual liberation.

With little practical Chinese involvement, the foreigners acted as defenders of Chinese sovereignty. In 1921, the United States was not a member of the League of Nations and its Senate refused to ratify the rest of the Paris agreement. These two factors left a door ajar for the country's future negotiations with other states about Shandong. Crane, appointed as the new US ambassador to China after Reisch, was convinced that the ratification of the entire Paris agreement should be derailed in order to prevent the Shandong clause in the Versailles Treaty being accepted and that the derailment could be done only with effective usage of media

³⁶ Jerry Israel, *Progressivism and the Open Door: America and China, 1905-1921* (London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 178-180.

³⁷ Mordechai Rozanski (born 1946) served as Rider University's sixth president. Previously, he had served as President of the University of Guelph in Ontario Canada for ten years.

propaganda.

Crane, therefore, hired Thomas Millard to orchestrate the campaign in the United States, aiming to persuade the Senators that the Shandong clause was unacceptable to the Chinese. Their efforts resonated with the anti-Wilson tendency in the Senate and the entire treaty was turned down. A year later, the Germans made an agreement with the United States to end the war. These two developments opened up possibilities for Shandong’s return to China.

(5) Undermining the Renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance

Recognizing each other as the dominant sea powers in the Pacific, the British and the Japanese signed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902, with an anticipated renewal of the agreement in 1922. A continuation of this alliance posed a threat to China in that the United Kingdom would remain supportive of Japan’s actions in China. The agreement also required both states, including their colonies, to provide support if one of them became involved in a war.

Crane negotiated with Wellington Koo,³⁸ from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, and other professionals and came up with a strategy to deconstruct the plan by talking the former British colonies, including Canada and Australia, out of renewing the alliance. To prepare his speech, Crane hired an experienced propagandist Lenox Simpson³⁹ (pseudonym: Putnam Weale) to work on building public opinion. Then in his speech,

³⁸ Vi Kyuin Wellington Koo (顧維鈞; 1888-1985) was a Chinese statesman of the Republic of China.

³⁹ Bertram Lenox Simpson (1877-1930) was a British author who wrote about China under the pen name “B. L. Putnam Weale” (or sometimes simply “Putnam Weale”).

he emphasized the joint liability of the colonies: “Do you really, in the case there is a war between Japan and the United States, which looks like something that might be coming very soon... Do you really want to get involved in a war against the United States?” Following up on this, the United States president, Warren G. Harding,⁴⁰ proposed to host the Washington Conference to stop the big powers’ arm race heating up in the Pacific and to freeze the fleets and naval facilities in their present status. The Canadians and Australians soon sided with Crane and with the idea of aborting the renewal of the alliance. The planned renewal was thereby undermined.

During the derailment of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance renewal, although the Chinese Foreign Ministry played a role, the entire action seemed to be taken by the foreigners.

(6) Recovering Shandong to China at the Washington Conference

The Washington Conference lasted from late 1921 to early 1922. Its main agenda was to halt the big powers’ arms race and, especially, to prevent Japan from building out its big naval installations in the Pacific, which might cut off America’s supply and communication with the Far East. A rather minor issue and arranged in a parallel negotiation, was Shandong. For the negotiations around Shandong, the American government invited delegations from Peking and Canton to participate and urged them to integrate as a united Chinese delegation, instead of representing individual Northern and Southern powers, despite the US’s official recognition of the Peking government. However, the Canton

⁴⁰ Warren Gamaliel Harding (1865-1923) was a member of the Republican Party, the 29th president of the United States from 1921 until his death in 1923.

delegation attacked the Peking representatives with various propaganda tools before the trip, preventing this strategy from taking form.

Apart from the discord between the Chinese governments, a greater issue worried the “Betterment of China Group,” in that the Chinese mass appeared to be indifferent to the Shandong issue, as their interests shifted to “trivia like sexual liberation.” To make the Chinese return to the Shandong concern, Sokolsky suggested to Donald that it was time to “start the student movement again,” and he asked Lamont for confidential information on the Japanese demands, which might spark another May Fourth Movement. At the same time, he organized a few demonstrations in Shanghai to push for the Chinese demands, but “found little echo.”

At the Washington conference, the Peking delegates, including Wellington Koo, Alfred Sze⁴¹ and Wang Chonghui⁴², a lawyer in the International Court of Justice, put the Japanese on the defensive. With the timely intervention and effort of the US Secretary of State, Hughes,⁴³ and the British Foreign Secretary, Balfour,⁴⁴ the conference facilitated Japan’s promise to return Shandong to full Chinese control.

Although the effort of the Chinese delegates at the conference was unarguable, the foreign diplomats made a remarkable contribution to the eventual return of Shandong to China.

⁴¹ Dr. Alfred Sao-ke Sze (施肇基; 1877-1958) was a prominent Chinese politician and diplomat during the most turbulent period in modern Chinese history.

⁴² Wang Ch’ung-hui (王寵惠; 1881-1958) was a prominent Chinese jurist, diplomat and politician who served the Republic of China from its foundation in 1912 until his death in 1958.

⁴³ Charles Evans Hughes Sr. (1862-1948) was an American statesman, Republican Party politician, and the 11th Chief Justice of the United States. He was the 44th United States Secretary of State.

⁴⁴ Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930) was a British Conservative statesman who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1902 to 1905, and Foreign Secretary in the Lloyd George ministry.

(7) Staying on Course

With old interests in China's territory revived since the early 1930s, the Japanese government invested to draw the United States on its side. To prepare the American public and also foreigners in China to counter Japan's action, the American Information Committee was set up in Shanghai as "a continuation of Sokolsky's China Information Committee" at the address of Carl Crow's advertisement agency. Some key members of the 'Betterment of China Group' joined the agency and remained committed to guarding China's sovereignty. They published a series of propagandist material, criticizing Japan and distributed them to all major American libraries with no charge.

Working beyond the agency, Donald became Chiang Kaishek's private secretary; Hollington Tong⁴⁵ and John Powell⁴⁶ were employed in a KMT propaganda agency primarily targeting the American spectators. However, their commitment to China put themselves in danger. Donald and Powell were both arrested by the Japanese. Donald was detained in a camp in Indonesia and left the place with terminal cancer. Powell returned from Shanghai with both feet amputated.

Conclusion

In the post May Fourth era, the movement was "taken over by the state agencies," with its legacy being heavily manipulated by political parties for propagandistic usage. Both the CCP and KMT fought to make great claims on it; and the currently permeating theory defines the

⁴⁵ Hollington K. Tong (董顯光; 1887-1971) was a Chinese journalist and diplomat.

⁴⁶ John William Powell (1919-2008) was a journalist and small business proprietor.

movement as China’s self-determination to struggle against Japan.

However, the parties’ claims to the legacy and the definition of self-determination were challenged by the foreign participants’ commitment to the event. Because the May Fourth’s Chinese and foreign protagonists were both aware of China’s dependence on foreign defense and support, politically, culturally and economically, they endeavored to retain assistance from, especially, the US government and shared close partnership in the planning and practice of the movement. Moreover, the foreign protagonists “provided guidance, information, and international propaganda. They made use of the US official support if it could be had, but continued to act in the same manner if it was not forthcoming.”

The movement “consciously acted as part of an international political ideological current” and “compensated for a strong asymmetry in the available means of communication, information, and propaganda compared to Japan and the Western powers.” Relying on the foreign informants and activists, the movement upheld an idealized Wilsonism pursuing sovereignty, democracy and peace. It also introduced propaganda to China as a means to secure national interest. The legitimacy of propaganda, notwithstanding, “as an argumentative genre was not questioned in China. And propaganda elements came, and continued, to be pervasive in China in literature, arts, and scholarship to this day as self-evidently legitimate forms of articulation.”

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