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SHAME ON YOU!: COMPETING NARRATIVES OF THE NATION IN THE LAOXIKAI INCIDENT AND THE TIANJIN ANTI-FRENCH CAMPAIGN, 1916–1917

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This article examines the anti-French campaign triggered by the Laoxikai incident — a dispute in 1916–17 over lands bordering the French concession in Tianjin. The incident was a focal point for competing narratives of the nation, each drawing on traditions and inspirations that implied divergent futures for China. Constitutional monarchism, true monarchism, republicanism, and Christianity all played into the power struggles of the 1910s. This article also addresses the role of violent coercion in the incident, in which nationalism began to legitimate “punishment” of Chinese who continued working with the French. The nationalists felt shame on behalf of their nation, and through public humiliation they forced Chinese who appeared indifferent to the nation to share in the national shame. This development accelerated a trend of nationalistic violence and the discourse of “national humiliation”.

KEYWORDS: *Nationalism, anti-foreign campaign, violence, Laoxikai, treaty ports*

On 20 October 1916, at approximately 8 p.m., nine Chinese police officers were taken into custody by French police in the disputed district of Laoxikai (老西開), which bordered the French concession in Tianjin. The arrest soon caused unforeseen problems for the French, when the captured men demanded that they be released from custody under the escort of a French military band parade, to humiliate France and strike a blow for Chinese national pride. The Chinese government requested that the policemen be returned to their station and the French apologize for violating Chinese sovereignty.¹ The incident sparked anti-French protests, strikes, and boycotts in Tianjin, which subsequently spread to other cities.²

¹ Laoxikai incident-related archives are housed mainly in the Academia Sinica, Taiwan (Sinica); Tianjin Municipal Archives, China (TMA); and Des Archives du Consulat de France, in Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (France) (CADN/ACF). For the requests, see Sinica, dossiers 03-30-007-02.

² On the relationship between nationalism, boycotts, and consumption during the Republic, see Karl Gerth, *China Made* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). Gerth did not write about the Laoxikai incident, nor to my knowledge have other major publications in English. Chinese publications address it superficially and mainly from an anti-imperialist perspective. See, for instance, *Tianjin Lishi Zhiliao* (*Tianjin Historical Documents*), 17 (December 1982). Laurent Galy is preparing a book, in French, on the French concession in Tianjin that includes the Laoxikai incident.

When the Laoxikai incident happened, China faced a domestic political crisis. The impact of European expansion had been keenly felt since at least the 1890s, and by the 1910s the issue had become explosive. A broad variety of political modernization narratives were translated into Chinese, and these interacted with existing ideas to suggest different futures for China. Royalists such as Kang Youwei (康有為 1858–1927) advocated constitutional monarchy; Sun Yat-sen's (孫中山 1866–1925) revolutionary republicanism emphasized Han nationalism; and traditional monarchism persisted among the power holders of the Northern Government (北洋政府 *Beiyang zhengfu*).³ The debate between tradition and modernity for China's future involved more than just a choice of political systems: they included differing narratives of the nation, and hence different nationalisms.⁴ At least as important was the perceived indifference to China's "peril" that antagonized writers such as Lu Xun (魯迅 1881–1936).⁵ This was not conscious, principled cosmopolitanism, but rather what one might call "non-nationalism" among people whose priorities lay elsewhere. "Non-nationalists" avoided political involvement when they could, but were forced into participation by the coercive violence of radical nationalists, and thus became "coerced nationalists." These different nationalisms, along with the legacy of Qing realpolitik, created the conditions in which the anti-French campaign took place.

Recent research by David Der-wei Wang, Susan Daruvala, and Theodore Hutters has demonstrated that the late Qing and Republican periods were a vibrant time that gave rise to many new ideas and social movements, which proposed various alternatives to the discourse of national humiliation.⁶ This article locates the Laoxikai incident and the anti-French campaign in the context of this complexity. It adds to the current understanding of the humiliation discourse by arguing that

³ For Kang, see Kung-Chuan Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World — K'ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858–1927* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1975). For the warlord government, see Edward A. McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Arthur Waldron, *From War to Nationalism: China's Turning Point, 1924–1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴ Examples of literature on Chinese nationalism: for a general overview, see Henrietta Harrison, *China: Inventing the Nation* (London: Arnold, 2001). For theoretical reflection, see Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995); Jonathan Unger, ed., *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1996); and Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). For elite nationalism, see Young-Tsu Wong, *Search for Modern Nationalism: Zhang Binglin* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989); For student nationalism, John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China 1927–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); For ethnic minority and Chinese nationalism, James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); For treaty ports and Chinese nationalism, James H. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City 1916–1932* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002). See also Henrietta Harrison, "Newspapers and Nationalism in Rural China, 1890–1919," *Past and Present*, 166 (2000); and Hans van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁵ Lu Xun's short stories are exemplary of the anguish of intellectuals on the indifference of the masses to the nationalistic cause, see for instance "Medicine (1919)," "The True Story of Ah Q (1921)" and the famous "iron house" metaphor in "Call to Arms (1922)."

⁶ David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-siecle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). Susan Daruvala, *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). Theodore Hutters, *Bringing the World Home* (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2005).

both the Qing and Republican states were weak in facing the challenge posed by imperial expansion, and that therefore society — in the form of various social organizations — rather than the state generated grassroots nationalism to confront that challenge. In this development, the growth of a coercive element in Chinese nationalism and the growing dominance of the humiliation discourse reinforced one another.

CHRONOLOGY AND PRIME MOVERS

The disputed Laoxikai region contained about 3000 *mu* (500 acres) of land adjacent to the existing French concession, which was established in 1860 and extended in 1901. The French Consul of Tianjin, H. Leduc, applied to the Circuit Intendant, Tang Shaoyi (唐紹儀 1862–1938), to expand the concession by annexing Laoxikai in 1902. Tang did not reply. The Catholic Church bought land in the area in 1913 and began building roads and constructing a St Joseph's Cathedral, a hospital, and schools, to house the newly established Vicar's Apostolic of Coastal Zhili. Simultaneously, French companies bought land in the area and established brick factories. A piece of land measuring 99 *mu* was first bought by a Monsieur Bera and sold to the French Municipal Council in June 1914, adding to 100 *mu* that the Council had already acquired the year before.⁷ When the church compound started functioning in July 1914, a Chinese police station was established in the area, and provoked vehement protests from the French, who then set up a competing police station with Chinese men in service. Diplomatic letters were exchanged, and counter-claims to the territory made. The Chinese side denounced the French claim of 1902 as unilateral and protested that they had not signed a treaty. The French cited judicial cases in the area, decided by the Municipal Council of the French concession, to support their claim.⁸ Because of their proximity to Beijing, the foreign concessions in Tianjin were a convenient haven for those fleeing the political upheaval that had plagued China since the late nineteenth century. They offered political and financial security to rich Chinese, former high officials, Manchu nobles, republican politicians and warlords, who came to live and invest there — the so-called *yugong* (寓公). Land prices in the French concession were high, speculation was rife, and attempts to annex neighboring lands, lawful or unlawful, were not uncommon.

The Catholic Church strongly denied allegations that it was conspiring with the French Consul to arrogate Laoxikai, and the Tianjin elite, consisting of Chinese merchants, degree holders, heads of organizations, and other members of the higher classes, gave the accusation little credence. The elite had learned, from the violence of the Tianjin Massacre of 1870 and the destruction of the Boxer uprising in 1900, to live in peace with Christians, foreign or native, and officials were careful to protect foreigners in their jurisdiction.

That did not make them unconcerned with the fate of Laoxikai, however. The elites of Tianjin organized a Society for Safeguarding Sovereignty and Territory (維持國權國土會 *Weichi guoquan guotu hui*, henceforth “the Sovereignty Society”) in early July 1915 to buy up the land of Laoxikai. Twenty members of the local elite

and fourteen heads of organizations, including schools, native-place associations, and Christian churches, were invited to the meeting. The core founders of the Sovereignty Society were members of the Tianjin General Chamber of Commerce (天津總商會 Tianjin zong shanghui), led by Bian Yinchang (卞蔭昌 1866–1926).⁹ By September of that year, the Society boasted 335 members. Most of the land in Laoxikai was either occupied by the church compound or owned by a French estate and mortgage company, Credit Foncier d'Extreme Orient (義品公司 Yipin gongsi), registered in Brussels. The exception was the land owned by a family called Zhang, who, by coincidence, owed the French company “several thousand yuan.” The Sovereignty Society jointly invested to pay the Zhang’s debt and buy their lands.¹⁰

On September 1 1915, the French Municipal Council distributed leaflets in Laoxikai explaining that they would begin to collect a land tax in five days. This angered local residents and prompted Zhao Guoqiang (趙國強) from the National Salvation Foundation (救國儲金會 Jiu guo chujin hui) to publish an open letter in a local newspaper attacking the French. This in turn moved the French to demand that the Chinese government punish the newspaper.¹¹ Because of these, in February 1916, the French Chargé d’Affaires proposed to divide Laoxikai between China and France.¹² The Chinese government did not immediately answer. The proposal discussed among the Chinese was to open up Laoxikai as a commercial zone run by the Chinese, but officials needed the locals to agree to it before they could answer the French. By early July there was still no consensus. The slow action and irresponsiveness antagonized the French, which exacerbated the situation.¹³ The French then came to the area to mark the boundaries on July 14 and 17, which raised further protests from the locals.¹⁴

The arrest of the Chinese policemen that sparked the Laoxikai incident happened after a French ultimatum issued on October 18: if there was no signature on the proposed treaty, the French police were free to take action after forty-eight hours. They did what they promised.¹⁵

In the evening, after news of the arrests spread, several hundred people were reportedly weeping outside the Chamber of Commerce and the office of Zhili Governor Zhu Jiabao (朱家寶 1860–1923), asking for the rescue of the policemen.¹⁶ The next day, around 8 a.m., thousands of people gathered outside the Chamber of Commerce. At noon, a general meeting was held in the Chamber’s

⁹ TMA, dossier 128-2-2-264; Sinica, 03-30-003-01-005; and *Tianjin zujie dangan xuan bian* (Collection of Archives on the Concessions of Tianjin) (Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1992), 107–09 and 116–17. For the involvement of the Chamber in the incident, see also Zhang Xiaobo, “Merchant Associational Activism in Early Twentieth-Century China: The Tianjin General Chamber of Commerce, 1904–1928” (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1995).

¹⁰ CADN/ACF, Tientsin dossier 36; and *Collection of Archives*, 107.

¹¹ For the tax issues, see Sinica, 03-30-002-03-014, 03-30-003-02-006, 03-30-004-01-001; for Zhao’s case, see Sinica, dossier 03-30-003-01.

¹² Sinica, dossiers 03-30-004-01 and 03-30-004-02.

¹³ Sinica, 03-30-005-02-007 and 03-30-005-03-006.

¹⁴ Sinica, 03-30-005-02-001.

¹⁵ Sinica, 03-30-005-04-013 and 03-30-005-04-014.

¹⁶ *Yishibao* (Social Welfare Tientsin), October 22 1916, and *Dagongbao* (L’Impartial Tientsin), October 22 1916.

hall where impassioned speakers, some in tears, argued for boycotting French goods and notes issued by French banks. The crowd then moved to the Governor's office and to the Provincial Assembly, where politicians vowed revenge.¹⁷ Thus an anti-French campaign began, led by local elites, which would engulf the city and spread to other parts of the country over the following six months.

Paralleling the campaign launched by society were diplomatic negotiations by the Northern Government. Under the mediation of British minister John Jordan (1852–1925), acting Foreign minister of the Northern Government, Xia Yiting (夏詒霆 1878–?) agreed with the acting French Minister, Damien de Martel (1878–1940) on November 10 1916 that Laoxikai would be jointly governed, but the agreement collapsed after the National Assembly refused to support the terms. John Jordan rejected further mediation, and Xia offered his resignation.

On 19 November, the French Municipal Council forced the nine arrested policemen out of the French concession. The Chinese side refused to receive them, for they had argued all along that the policemen be sent back to the site of their arrest. The head of the police squad, Sun Fangyu (孫方鈺), posted his resignation to the police bureau of Tianjin after his release. He felt too ashamed even to visit the police office, for he failed to assert national pride by being released in this manner.¹⁸

In the diplomatic deadlock, the prominent diplomat Wu Tingfang (伍廷芳 1842–1922) was appointed foreign minister. His fluent French was widely expected as a weapon on diplomatic tables, to make the French aware of the national sentiments that had accumulated in the wake of the incident. Wu's negotiations concluded on December 12 under more or less the same terms as set by Jordan, except for the inclusion of an apology by the French government for the arrest of the police officers. Damien de Martel agreed, but the French government refused to acquiesce.¹⁹ The issue remained unresolved even through the Japanese occupation of Tianjin during the Second World War, and only ceased to be an issue after France relinquished all colonial claims in China in 1946.²⁰

THE CULTURAL AND FINANCIAL BASES OF THE ANTI-FRENCH CAMPAIGN

The anti-French campaign occurred in the context of calamitous social and political upheaval. After more than half a century of imperial aggression, wars and unequal treaties, concessions of sovereign rights and territories, and incidents involving foreigners since the First Opium War (1839–42), Chinese nationalism had become ascendant and assertive. Many Chinese had begun to view their collective self as a nation in the ways of Europeans and Japanese, and as a consequence a modern national identity emerged. The modern Chinese identity is not an entirely “derivative discourse.”²¹ But the active imitation of European ways of nation building were evident in republican revolutions, in the translation of nationalistic concepts and in the imagination of a Chinese community in print

¹⁷ Ibid., *Dagongbao* reports more than 1000, *Yishibao* reports 4,000.

¹⁸ Sinica, dossiers, 03-30-007, 03-30-008, and 03-30-009.

¹⁹ Sinica, dossiers, 03-30-009 and 03-30-010.

²⁰ For the controversy during Japanese occupation, see TMA, dossier 1-3-2-762.

²¹ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

media and in literature. Multiple theories and narratives opened new mental spaces that stretched back into reinterpretations of the ancient past and out across the globe through imported theories such as social Darwinism. Translated vocabularies of territory (國土 *guotu*), sovereignty (主權 *zhuquan*; 國權 *guoquan*), national citizens (國民 *guomin*), and Chinese citizens (華民 *huamin*) entered popular use.²²

Chinese nationalism, in its modern form, was weak before the 1890s. At its best, it was a loose collective identity. Between 1860 and the 1900s, for instance, the letters exchanged between Qing officials and the petitions filed by Tianjin residents concerning the Tianjin concessions had mainly involved arguments of benevolent governing and moral justice.²³ Starting around 1907, however, the petitions and letters employed the language of nationalism to reason against the expansion of concessions or disputes related to foreigners.²⁴ The 1911 revolution increased the circulation of nationalistic concepts, while the new Republic provided a platform for expressing new identities. Locally, Tianjin had been experimenting with self-government since 1902, thanks to the New Policy reform.²⁵ A sense of “Chineseness,” based on opposition to the foreigners in the treaty port, was growing. Although there were competing views on what China was and where its future lay, the cultural basis for launching an anti-French campaign in the name of nation was strong by 1916 and it burst into the public sphere of Tianjin in the wake of the arrests.

Led by the elite, within four days the people of Tianjin organized a General Meeting of Citizens (公民大會 *gongmin dahui*) and gathered 1642 founding members. The General Meeting became an umbrella organization for other patriotic groups during the course of the campaign. With 8000 people, including onlookers, reported in attendance, the first gathering of the General Meeting on October 25 passed six resolutions: (1) telegraphing the whole country to boycott French goods; (2) boycotting currency issued by French banks; (3) barring French from recruiting Chinese indentured workers; (4) banning the sale of Chinese goods to the French; (5) punishing anyone caught spying on the campaign for the French; and (6) requesting expulsion of the French Chargé d’Affaires to China and the French Consul in Tianjin.²⁶

In early November the General Meeting passed a resolution to strike against French-related companies and institutions. The negotiated plan for the two governments to jointly manage the land was not satisfactory, and the strike began on November 12, with 180 workers from the Credit Foncier d’Extreme Orient and other companies first to take action. By November 14, the number increased to 600; three days later it had risen to 869; and by the tenth day some 1400 workers were on strike. The number peaked at 1686 on December 25. The strikers included

²² For a discussion of translated terms, see Liu, *Translingual Practice*.

²³ For the concept of benevolent governing, see Vivienne Shue, “The Quality of Mercy: Confucian Charity and the Mixed Metaphors of Modernity in Tianjin,” *Modern China*, 32. 4 (2006), 411–52.

²⁴ See archival files of this period in Sinica and TMA.

²⁵ For the New Policy, see Julia Strauss, “Creating ‘Virtuous and Talented’ Officials for the Twentieth Century: Discourse and Practice in Xinzhen China,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 37. 4 (2003), 831–50.

²⁶ *Yishibao*, October 26 1916, and *Dagongbao*, October 26 1916. *Collection of Archives*, 117.

factory workers, power station technicians, Chinese serving in the French police, hotel kitchen staff, and household servants of French families. Workers not from Tianjin were accommodated in a straw depot and in the main building of the Chamber of Commerce.²⁷

As consequence of the strike, a Frenchman and a Vietnamese were electrocuted when they attempted to operate the power station to light up the pitch-dark concession.²⁸ The concession applied martial law on November 20, with French and Vietnamese soldiers patrolling neighborhoods.²⁹ By December 5, the English newspaper *Peking and Tientsin Times* triumphantly claimed “the strike agitation has long ceased to occasion any really serious inconvenience.”³⁰

From the beginning, the strikers were paid part, if not all, of their salaries by the General Meeting. At first, funding came from donations from local elite and charitable concerts, theater, and movies. The core members of the Sovereignty Society pledged to provide cash if shortages arose. After the strike began, money poured in from individuals, companies, and organizations. Students saved one *jiao* from their monthly allowance to help; one person sold his collection of paintings; workers in a railway kitchen organized a monthly subscription; the Merchants’ Chamber of Mirrors made a collective donation; and rickshaw pullers, among others, gave one day’s pay for the cause. There were also donations from other provinces, especially from students.³¹ *Yishibao* (益世報 *Social Welfare Tientsin*), the most vocal supporter among the Chinese newspapers, advertised an appeal requesting that every reader donate one *jiao*, calculating that ten readers per copy and a circulation of 20,000 would easily gather 20,000 *yuan* a day.³² By November 24, the General Meeting had gathered 40,000 *yuan*, and donations kept coming. The cost of the strikers’ salaries by December 24 was 20,300 *yuan* with 1686 people on payroll, averaging 12 *yuan* per striker.³³ By January 1917, the charitable movies and theaters reported receiving little income for the campaign.³⁴ The campaign, nevertheless, ran well into April 1917 with the funds it raised.

COMPETING NARRATIVES IN POLITICS AND SOCIETY

When the policemen were arrested in the winter of 1916, it was less than five years after the 1911 Revolution, which had dramatically changed the course of the country by providing a new political framework. The transformation of society and the economy since the late Qing continued to impose an order (or disorder) of its own, assailing the Republic with a barrage of new ideas and social movements.³⁵ The Republic had a vibrant public sphere that the Tianjin elite found their anti-French campaign had to penetrate and compete in. They anchored

²⁷ *Yishibao*, November 3, 14, and 17, and December 24 1916; and *Dagongbao*, November 13, 14, and 17, and December 24 1916.

²⁸ *Dagongbao*, November 16 1916.

²⁹ TMA, dossier JO128-2-2-264.

³⁰ *Peking and Tientsin Times*, December 5 1916.

³¹ See November, December, and January issues of *Yishibao* and *Dagongbao*.

³² *Yishibao*, November 24 1916.

³³ *Yishibao*, November 25 1916 and *Dagongbao*, December 28 1916.

³⁴ *Dagongbao*, January 8 1917.

³⁵ Hutters, *Bringing the World Home*.

their campaign in the narrative that the French had violated China's sovereignty by arresting the policemen, and that the land of Laoxikai was Chinese soil, of which not an inch should be ceded to the French. They claimed to represent a collective will, as expressed by a "General Meeting of Citizens," that endeavored to "Safeguard Sovereignty and Territory" — the very names of their organizations alluded to a modern nation in the form of a republic.

Tianjin had, however, chosen to support the bid by Yuan Shikai (袁世凱 1859–1916) to crown himself emperor in 1916, which had collapsed only six months earlier. The local governor and assembly had issued their support, while the local newspapers had been filled with articles supporting Yuan for months before his self-enthronement. On January 1 1916, they even began dating their newspapers Hongxian (洪憲) with reference to Yuan's new reign. Tianjin's support for Yuan's move was primarily because of the connections and political tribalism Yuan had cultivated while he was Governor of Zhili during the last years of the Qing. Tianjin was the key city of Yuan's power base. Because the new Republic was in its infancy, Yuan's proximity to the center of power emboldened him. Although he gave a nod to the new politics by including "*xian* 憲 (constitutionalism)" in his reign title, Yuan's government was envisioned as a constitutional monarchy, not far different from the one the Qing had adopted only a decade before, in their last bid to cling to power.

The idea of monarchism surfaced again in July 1917 when the military man Zhang Xun (張勳 1854–1923) installed the child emperor Puyi (溥儀 1906–67) back on his old throne. Scholars such as Kang Youwei were called upon to lend support and take positions in the court. Kang had faith in constitutional monarchism, believing that the Chinese political traditions could be combined with the virtues of western politics to restore stability and raise China to its rightful place in the international order. The focus of his loyalty was the monarch as much as the nation: a Japanese model that had high credibility after the Japanese victory over the Qing in 1895. But once again restoration proved a humiliating fiasco. Kang retired from public life, and Zhang Xun sought asylum in the German concession in Tianjin.

The Laoxikai incident happened in the months between the two failed restorations, and Tianjin was briefly caught up in monarchical politics. When the Republic was reinstated after Yuan's failure, the protesters of Laoxikai, newspaper editors, and local politicians brought the anti-French campaign to the national stage and demanded support from the new Northern Government. The men who formed it, former Qing military generals and future warlords, restored the trappings of a republic, because, after Yuan's and Zhang's failures, republicanism seemed the only legitimate alternative. Yet the military power the generals wielded frustrated the development of civil society, and Republican politics became militarized.³⁶ The government upon whose support Tianjin called was therefore a product of expedience, with an incoherent and ambiguous idea of nationhood.

Tianjin's national campaign also needed to compete with the version of the nation put forward by the Guomindang and its supporters, based mainly in the south. Ten days after the Laoxikai incident, on October 31, the revered veteran

³⁶ McCord, *The Power of the Gun*.

revolutionary Huang Xing (黃興 1874–1916) died. Eight days later and just four days before the strike, another Republican giant figure Cai E (蔡鍔 1882–1916) passed away. The two deaths were a topic on which the nation could dwell. Newspapers devoted broad space to their homage and demanded state funerals. There was even a theatrical performance in Shanghai on Cai's legendary life before his funeral took place. A theater in Tianjin sent down a camera crew to record the repatriation of Cai E's body from Japan, where he had gone for treatment of tuberculosis.³⁷ The homage to Huang and Cai represented the Guomindang version of nationalism, with its idea of a Han race-centered China, its identification with historic anti-Manchu movements, and its incorporation of nineteenth century theories of race. Tianjin's case found more sympathetic ears among the Guomindang, but Laoxikai was colorless in comparison to Cai's achievements and the romantic stories surrounding him and struggled to attract readers' attentions.

Chinese Christians also presented their versions of the nation in the public domain, through their campaign against the movement for legislating Confucianism as the national religion.³⁸ Their "open telegram (公電 *Gongdian*)," along with editorials in opposition to the movement, could be read throughout 1916 and 1917 in all major newspapers. They argued that the nation should be a space for religious freedom.³⁹ The influence of Christianity on national politics should not be underestimated; their activism forced the campaign for legislating Confucianism as a national religion to retreat, making the new China non-Confucian.

When the Laoxikai incident broke out, concerns arose because the land housed the St Joseph's Cathedral, and the rumors of the church conspiring with the French Consul to seize the lands were widespread. Chinese Christians of Zhili and Tianjin quickly pledged their support to the anti-French campaign and made donations to the strikers. One group, which signed its open telegrams as "Catholics (天主教民 *Tianzhujiao min*)," offered their lives if China should go to war with France.⁴⁰ To the Tianjin people, things have dramatically changed. In the Tianjin Massacre and Boxer War, Christians in Tianjin — Chinese as much as foreigners — were alien "others" that threatened the Chinese "self." In the Laoxikai incident, Christianity had ceased to be a point differentiating the self from the other. Christianity in this case has been absorbed into Chinese national identity. The Catholics declared they were Chinese foremost, and would die for the sake of the nation.

The dynamic external environment of 1916 and 1917 exacerbated the political complications of the Republic. Laoxikai was not the only foreign affairs issue that worried patriots and encouraged nationalism. Concerns regarding the ongoing Zhengjiatun (鄭家屯) case with Japan, the British in Tibet, and border issues with Russia occupied space in the national newspapers every day.

³⁷ See October, November, and December issues of *Yishibao*, *Dagongbao*, *Chenzhongbao* (*Morning Bell Daily*), and especially the *Shun Pao*.

³⁸ For the movement, see Han Hua, *Minchu kongjiaohui yu guojiao yundong yanjiu* (*On the Confucian Society and National Religion Movement in the Early Republic*) (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2007).

³⁹ See issues between October 1916 and January 1917 of *Yishibao*, *Dagongbao*, *Chenzhongbao*, and *Shun Pao*.

⁴⁰ For instance, *Yishibao*, October 24 1916, October 26 1916, and November 26 1916; and *Chenzhongbao*, October 26 1916.

Even the rumored assassination of the superstar of Chinese opera, Mei Lanfang (梅蘭芳 1894–1961), in November 1916, stole public space from the Tianjin patriots. Reports about the story prompted a columnist of the *Yishibao* to criticize Mei's followers of having no dignity, because they were crying for Mei as if their parents had just died, and questioned whether they would shed even a tear for the nation. Nationalists could attack Mei's fans, because they believed they represented a China that every individual should subscribe to. The violence of nationalism in this case remained on the level of words, that is, of narratives.

Theatrical entertainment like Mei's, along with traditional pastimes and modern city social life, continued on its own course in the time of rising nationalism. It easily competed with the Tianjin case for the reader's attention. *Dagongbao* often had two-thirds of its pages filled by advertisements, mostly for various theatres, traditional and western imported medicines, male clinics, and male tonic. Yet if ads competed with nationalistic content, they also financed the publication of newspapers and the circulation of nationalistic information.

The cacophony of Republican society ultimately drowned out the Tianjin case. Nationalism surged during the incident, but the scale of the campaign itself, and its immediate impact on society were limited. The different conceptions of the nation that competed in 1916–17 were short-lived, and would later be absorbed in different ways into the dominating discourse of national humiliation.

THE DISCOURSE OF NATIONAL HUMILIATION GAINS MOMENTUM

Tianjin could not trigger a nationwide patriotic awakening, but it certainly added momentum to the discourse of national humiliation. The anti-French campaign was itself inspired by an anti-Japanese campaign, instigated the previous year in response to Yuan Shikai's capitulation to Japan's "Twenty-One Demands." That unprecedented upsurge of patriotism gave birth to National Humiliation Day and the spread of humiliation discourse.⁴¹ A branch of the National Salvation Foundation had been established in Tianjin to collect donations for the purpose of "saving the nation (救國 *jiuguo*)," and discussions of how to use the fund were juxtaposed with reports on Laoxikai. The head of the Foundation, Zhao Guoqiang, was vocal against the French, as mentioned above. There were also several street demonstrations against the Japanese in 1915. Both the time and the emotional distance separating the anti-Japanese from the anti-French campaigns were short. The surge of nationalism in 1915 made possible the mobilization of thousands of people during the Laoxikai incident.

The General Meeting that oversaw the anti-French campaign established a Speech Group (*Yanshuo tuan* 演說團) to promote their cause and patriotism in general. Twenty-four speakers, divided into twelve teams, spread out across Tianjin and delivered speeches in the assemblies of the General Meeting and some twenty tea houses, theaters, and cinemas. In one talk, speakers displayed world maps as they spoke about the Russian annexation of "Chinese lands" a thousand times bigger than Laoxikai. Framing the issue in the discourse of humiliation, the

⁴¹ Luo Zhitian, "National Humiliation and National Assertion: the Chinese Response to the Twenty-one Demands," *Modern Asian Studies*, 27. 2 (1993), 297–319.

speakers argued that even a small piece of land, such as Laoxikai, mattered because “people now have broad knowledge, and they all embrace patriotic passion.”⁴² The Speech group, consisting mostly of young men, delivered passionate talks in front of tea drinkers and leisure-seeking audiences. In the process, they transformed public places into breeding grounds for nationalistic sentimentality.

The General Meeting also posted placards around the city and distributed leaflets on the streets.⁴³ But newspapers were the primary method of advocating the campaign. Not only could nationalistic reports and articles be read every day, but readers actively bought advertising space to express their nationalism. Two individuals together published an advertisement in the two main newspapers of Tianjin, the *Yishibao* and *Dagongbao* (大公報 *L'Impartial Tientsin*), telling of their anger over “French occupation of our lands.” They proclaimed that they were moving out of the French concession and urged others to follow. They entitled their advertisement: “Announcement in Tears (泣告 qigao),” and pleaded, “Don’t be gutless and let foreigners laugh at Chinese.” Three days later, another six people left the French concession, with an advertisement urging others, “Do not let those bullying us laugh at us (勿今欺我者轉而笑我也 *wu jin qiwozhe zhuan er xiao wo ye*).”⁴⁴ A Chinese estate company offered reduced housing prices as an incentive to Chinese living in the French concession to move out.⁴⁵ Although the number of Chinese abandoning the French concession seemed limited, the message that China was being humiliated was vivid and circulated widely. Zhao Guoqiang of the National Salvation Foundation also pleaded that this time Chinese patriotism should not become another “five minutes of enthusiasm, for which foreigners had long derided the Chinese (五分鐘之熱度久為外人所譏笑 *wu fenzhong zhi redu jiu wei wairen suo jixiao*).”⁴⁶ These comments of being laughed at by foreigners were part of the discourse of humiliation, conceptualized in melodramatic fashion. The self-consciousness of being looked down upon and laughed at on an international stage was the essence of the humiliation discourse in the early Republic.

The idea of national humiliation circulated through open telegrams in newspapers. Nearly every local government, assembly, and military head was cabled by the local Tianjin government urging them to participate in the campaign. Most provinces did not join in but they sent telegrams of support, and these were published in newspapers.⁴⁷ In the meantime, the Tianjin General Chamber of Commerce used its connections to provoke similar telegrams from their fellow merchants in nearly every province, which were also published. Some telegrams were restrained, arguing that French actions violated international law and constituted outright bullying, while others used language like “*fēn* (憤 anger)” and

⁴² *Yishibao*, December 6 1916.

⁴³ *Dagongbao*, October 30 1916; *Peking and Tientsin Times*, October 27 1916.

⁴⁴ *Yishibao* and *Dagongbao*, November 13, 14, and 18 1916.

⁴⁵ *Yishibao*, November 22 1915.

⁴⁶ *Collection of Archives*, 111–12.

⁴⁷ *Yishibao*, October 25 1916.

“*chi* (恥 humiliating),”⁴⁸ emotive language that turned Chinese nationalism further towards a discourse of humiliation.

Fujian and Sichuan were the first two provinces to launch boycotts in support of Tianjin, in October, but participation was limited, and the French Legation quickly pressured the central government to stop them.⁴⁹ Two delegates were sent in early December to solicit boycotts in Shanghai, but Shanghai merchants rejected the proposal because they were locked into contracts with French silk buyers signed the year before. The significantly lower market prices of silk that year would translate into an immediate loss of profits if the merchants joined the action. Instead, Shanghai asked French merchants in the city to put pressure on the French Chargé d’Affaires to reach an amicable agreement, while Shanghai merchants expressed their desire for successful negotiations to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵⁰ Shanghai’s participation was essential for the success of a national campaign: by November, the only province that had participated in the boycott was Hunan, where a local branch of the Sovereignty Society had been established to distribute leaflets and deliver speeches in the streets.⁵¹

Hunan’s participation was secured by the Zhili Native-Place Association in the province. Similarly, in Beijing, three days after the arrest of the Chinese police officers, meetings had been held in Beijing, with around six hundred Zhili natives in attendance. The meeting resolved that Zhili representatives at the national congress would propose an impeachment if the central government did not act. Beijing’s Zhili native association called their meeting the Beijing Meeting of Zhili Citizens, and a few days later, they changed their name to the National General Meeting of Citizens (全國公民大會 *Quanguo gongmin dahui*).⁵² Shanghai, Zhangjiakou (張家口), Baoding (保定), and Jilin (吉林) established their own general meetings of citizens, also organized by Zhili or Tianjin native-place associations.⁵³

The metamorphoses of native-place associations into the general meetings of citizens reflected the wide circulation of the concept of citizenship in various words (國民 *guomin*, 公民 *gongmin*, 新民 *xinmin*), and it bespoke the transformation of China into a modern nation.⁵⁴ It bridged the gap between existing native-place identities and new national identities. The idea of the hometown in danger had deep emotional resonance, and the native-place associations were an established organizational network that had outposts in many of the republic’s cities and could be mobilized rapidly in response. Through the native place association network, the humiliation discourse spread to where newspapers could not reach, and into the emotional space that spoke meaning to the populations. The events in

⁴⁸ For the use of the telegram, see Daniel Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon, Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851–1945* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁴⁹ Sinica, dossiers 03-30-007-02-002.

⁵⁰ *Peking and Tientsin Times*, December 21 1916.

⁵¹ *Chenzhongbao*, November 3 1916; *Yishibao*, November 6 and 8 1916; and *Dagongbao*, November 10 1916.

⁵² *Chenzhongbao*, October 27 and November 20 1916; *Yishibao*, November 27 1915; and *Dagongbao*, December 8 1916.

⁵³ *Chenzhongbao*, November 5 1916; *Dagongbao*, December 16 1916.

⁵⁴ For the concept of citizen, see Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Tianjin were incorporated into the wider discourse of national humiliation as yet another example of foreign aggression and the incapacity of the Chinese states.

GRASSROOTS NATIONALISM

The desire for a strong state that would be able to stand up for Chinese people (or the Chinese “race” in other contexts) and end the indignity suffered at foreigners’ hands was the essence of the humiliation discourse. At the turn of the century and in the decades following, the pattern had been that both the Qing and the Republic were weak in facing the challenges posed by the West, Russia, and Japan. The state’s impotence created the frustration in society. The Boxer uprising was a major outlet for this frustration, which manifested as superstitious peasant xenophobia combined with state power.⁵⁵ The “official nationalism” planned during the New Policy involved the state unsuccessfully attempting to harness this sentiment for its own survival.⁵⁶ When Russia intruded in the northeast during 1903 and 1904, the students who came back from studying in Japan launched a campaign to urge the people, not the state, to take action.⁵⁷ And, during the protest against the Twenty-One Demands of 1915, patriotic sentiment spread further, as did frustration with the state.

Ad hoc organizations in Tianjin, in different forms and with varying degrees of radicalness, conveyed this sense of dissatisfaction. They included the National Salvation Foundation, the Society for Safeguarding Sovereignty and Territory, the General Meeting of Citizens, Speech Groups and the Patriotic Group (愛國團 Aiguotuan) and Defense Society (保衛社 Baowei she) — another two radical offshoots of the General Meeting. These organizations were the means through which people united and took the matter into their own hands. At the height of the Laoxikai incident, one newspaper commented that the twentieth-century’s foreign affairs are people’s foreign affairs; “when the government cannot be relied on, we people shall fast stand up [for the nation] (政府不足恃國民其速興 *zhengfu buzushi guomin qi suxing*).”⁵⁸ The temper of society in the Tianjin incident forced the government to demand the return of the Chinese policemen to their station, while the governor of Zhili and members of the Zhili Assembly pledged their patriotism only when crowds gathered outside their offices.

The state responded timidly. In the heat of the campaign, the Prime Minister Duan Qirui (段祺瑞 1865–1936) sent a telegram to the Zhili Governor:

Concerning the Tianjin case, on the afternoon of the 6th [November 1916], three ambassadors came out of the blue to visit, asserting the interests of the allied nations, which are hard to ignore; [they argued] in addition that asking the French Consul to escort the return of the policemen is something that has never happened in our nations’ handling of diplomacy. France alone

⁵⁵ Robert A. Bickers and R. G. Tiedemann, *The Boxers, China, and the World* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

⁵⁶ Ya-pei Kuo, “Redeploying Confucius: The Imperial State Dreams of the Nation, 1902–1911,” in Julie Remoiville and Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, eds, *Chinese Religiosities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 65–86.

⁵⁷ *Eshi jingwen* (*Alarming News on Russian Affairs*), 1903–04.

⁵⁸ *Chenzhongbao*, October 27 1916.

can be turned away, but not also Great Britain, Japan, and Russia, who came forcefully to intervene. Continuing to fight may soon precipitate another crisis. Thus, I instantaneously telegram you that although the peoples' spirits are high, and this could be employed to support the action of the government, the situation has developed such that there is no choice but to change the direction [of policy]. Whether or not the local elite and people can restrain from feverish moves, it is up to you, Governor, and Police Bureau head, Yang, to deal with care to exhort and pacify.⁵⁹

The government felt pressure from both foreign powers and domestic society, and they chose to ask society to back off. In the 1910s, and in the previous two decades, the state not only trailed behind society-generated national sentiment but became a force against this development. In contrast to later in the twentieth century, when Chinese nationalism was often orchestrated "top down" by the state, the three decades before the 1920s saw the transformation of Chinese nationalism from the "bottom up," in the form of patriotic organizations and movements. Before the 1920s, state institutions had limited interests vested in nationalism. If any existed, they were easily eclipsed by the need to avoid antagonizing foreign powers, as evidenced by the letter from Duan.

Less than two years after the Laoxikai campaign, the May Fourth movement would sweep over the Republic. Yet, republicanism did not find itself crowned the absolute political system for China, although constitutional monarchism and warlord politics were by then dismissed. What became sacred was rather the spirit of the nation. The ideology of nationalism won out over realpolitik, as the combination of strong society and weak state reached its conclusion: the primary target of society's frustration switched from the foreign aggressors to the Chinese state that appeased them. May Fourth was a result of an accumulation of nationalistic discourse since the late 1890s, and the Tianjin incident contributed to its making. Before Lu Xun called the Chinese nation to arms in his short stories and essays from 1918, nationalistic discourse of a type that would inspire May Fourth had already come into being, beyond constitutional monarchism, monarchism and republicanism. This discourse of the spirit of the nation already circulated and was incarnated in various movements and campaigns before 1919. These waves of national sentiment were society-generated, that is grassroots; with its sense of urgency and crisis, had the radical tendency to be open to the discourse of humiliation. Through the discourse of humiliation, the society was urged to take action to relieve the nation from the undesirable situation of weakness.

VIOLENCE AND COERCIVE NATIONALISM

Even though a sea change took place in these three decades, the sense of crisis and the nationalism it generated were by no means shared by every individual. Circumstances such as Laoxikai, however, made solidarity necessary in the eyes of activists. When people did not subscribe to the ideas of the self-styled patriots or take the action they demanded, then violence committed in the name of the nation against them became justice in the eyes of the patriots. Those who were initially

⁵⁹ *Collection of Archives*, 125.

indifferent were often dragged into their roles: a form of coerced nationalism. The punishment of the unpatriotic forced them into positions of patriotism, warning other so-called traitors.

Nationalists regarded actions without patriotic passion as punishable crimes. When acting Foreign Minister Xia Yiting came to Tianjin to investigate the case on October 28, members of the Sovereignty Society challenged him over the lack of patriotic feeling in his speech. The next day, members of the General Meeting rushed to the Tianjin branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, beat up the gate guards who tried to stop them, and piled into the office to confront Xia. Xia condescendingly answered, "If I can manage the case, I will deal with it; if it cannot be done, then I will not (可以辦我就辦, 不能辦我就不辦 *keyi ban wojiu ban, buneng ban wojiu bu ban*)." The crowd shouted, "Shame on you! (好不要臉 *hao bu yaolian*)." Xia then promised to resign if the negotiations failed. A staff member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded, "Laoxikai was handed to the French by your own Tianjin native, Tang Shaoyi. It had nothing to do with us! (老西開是你們自己天津人唐紹儀送給法國人, 不關我們的事 *Laoxikai shi nimen ziji Tianjinren Tan Shaoyi songgei Faguoren, buguan women de shi*)." The man, together with Xia, was chased from the scene. They escaped unhurt, but the mob smashed the office and another member of its staff, who had not been involved, was injured.⁶⁰

Worker solidarity was required to launch a strike that would silence French factories and leave the French concession in chaos. Many workers were persuaded, if not coerced into, striking. The *Peking and Tientsin Times* reported one case in which Chinese workers were forced to strike:

Strike agitators have been very active of late in the French Concession, and quite a number have been caught red-handed, so to speak. To specify one instance: Mme. Thesmar happened to be looking out of a window at her residence and espied a Chinese making grim and threatening signs to a coolie who was employed at the house. She informed her husband, who caught the man and handed him over to the military police.⁶¹

The *Peking and Tientsin Times*, as a foreign publication, might be expected to report incidents and strikes in the interest of foreigners and the concessions. But evidence of coercion could be found in Chinese newspapers, too, where it was reported as justice served. A dozen people who continued working for the French were arrested as *hanjian* (漢奸 traitors) either by the Patriotic Group or the Defense Society. They handed the "unpatriotic" to the police, who were obliged to detain them not merely in the interest of solidarity, but also because the anti-French campaign was set off precisely by the arrest of the nine policemen. The old categorization *hanjian*, which dynastic governments previously employed to identify their enemies, was now turned towards creating solidarity and hammering nationalism into the public with the sanction of state institutions, in this case the police.

⁶⁰ *Yishibao*, October 30 1916 and *Dagongbao*, October 30 1916.

⁶¹ *Peking and Tientsin Times*, December 5 1916.

A translator, Wang Zilang (王子良), made himself a target when he acted as an interpreter to stop Chinese workers from leaving French factories. Wang was arrested by the Patriotic Group on November 18, and on November 25 he found himself removed from the police station to the headquarters of the General Meeting. He was then fitted into a *cangue* with a white banner atop stating how he had become a *hanjian*. He was paraded through the streets like a criminal from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., before being thrown back into police custody. Two days later, the same drama was repeated. The original plan was to parade him for four days, but somehow he was spared and released. A week later, Wang's "announcement in tears" in Tianjin's two main Chinese newspapers repented his wrongdoing and vowed to cut his connections with the French. The French Chargé d'Affaires complained to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, claiming that Wang was serving in the French military and had a military title. The Tianjin police responded that Wang "voluntarily came to the station asking for protection (自行來廳請求保護 *zixing lai ting qingqiu baohu*)," with a statement signed by Wang attached to a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as proof. Wang attested in both the statement and the newspaper advertisement that he was working for a French ferry company instead of the military, to pre-empt any possible claims by the French under international law.⁶²

Equally violently humiliated was Yu Guangwen (于光文), who worked in a French hotel as a translator and was arrested for helping the French recruit Chinese workers after the strike had begun. Yu was punished by being forced to kneel, with a banner on top, in the yard of the General Meeting headquarters.⁶³ Chen Zhiqin (陳芝琴) was arrested on November 29 in a popular tea house, Shangtianxian (上天仙), after he was discovered to be a major comprador of the French. Chen was treated rather well, for he was of a certain status for being rich, and was released a few days later. Simultaneously, a handsome sum of 10,000 *yuan* was allegedly donated to the General Meeting to help strikers. The workers were angry at the release and were only later pacified when Chen came to the headquarters to apologize for his past wrongs in person.⁶⁴

The principle behind such incidents was to force individuals, who were indifferent to nationalism and did not appear to feel the nation's shame of their own accord, to feel it by being personally humiliated in public on account of their indifference. The weakness of the state made this even more imperative, for the future of the nation lay in the solidarity of society. The *hanjian*, like the indifferent fans of the opera star Mei Lanfang, whom the *Yishibao* columnist had berated for caring more about their idol than their country, represented the indifference of those in society who had no interest or stake in the nationalistic discourse. They were thought to be rightful targets of violence, which would beat nationalism into them. Just as the native place associations were transformed into citizens' meetings — converting native place identity into a new identity as national citizens — so, too, the new usage of the traditional category *hanjian* made the new identity as members of the Chinese nation compulsory. In such

⁶² Sinica, 03-30-009-02-004 and 03-30-009-02-006; *Yishibao*, November 20, 26 and 29, December 3 1915; and *Dagongbao*, November 26 1916.

⁶³ *Yishibao*, December 11 1916; *Dagongbao*, December 12 1916.

⁶⁴ *Dagongbao*, November 30, December 20 1916; *Yishibao*, December 5, 8, 12 1916.

instances of translation and transformation, the local met the global, though the native associations and the term *hanjian* simultaneously retained their original significance in other contexts.

THE LAOXIKAI INCIDENT IN WIDER HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Of the three *hanjian* described above, Wang's case in particular foreshadowed a pattern that would become widespread half a century later in the mass mobilization of the Cultural Revolution. In the anti-French campaign, one finds precedents both of the principle that national loyalty should take priority over individual wellbeing, and of the practice of employing public humiliation to extract political loyalty in the name of nation. From violence against unpatriotic individuals in 1916–17 to mass mobilization in the name of national modernization in the 1960s, violent nationalism remained unchecked and was often encouraged, and was exploited in the *realpolitik*.

But the imperative of national identity, and the violence attached, did not emerge in Tianjin or even China alone; it was a local manifestation of the global structural assumption that every individual is born with a national identity. Chinese nationalism was part of a phenomenon of “new nationalism” that arose in many places around the world during the hundred years from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth in response to the expansion of the West.⁶⁵ The violence derived from politicization of identities was built into the structure of the global nation-state system and was manifested and internalized as nationalism, which, by its nature, involves exclusivity, defensiveness, and often aggression. Even though local circumstances may strengthen or ease the level of potential violence, the violence itself is innate to the structure. The assumed identity is especially pronounced in the hostile circumstances of a supposed war, such as the Laoxikai incident. Individuals were literally forced to adopt national identities and to “be Chinese.”

In addition to the global political structure, global circulation of capital also played a role in Tianjin's anti-French campaign. The wealth generated in the treaty port and enjoyed by the Chinese allowed Laoxikai supporters to express nationalism in financial terms, first in the attempt to buy the land and pre-empt French annexation, and later in donations, through which nationalist sentiment mobilized financial capital to fund the strike. The new technology of telegrams, together with the new medium of newspapers, allowed the nationalists to formulate their “imagined community” and to communicate their national sentiment, especially the humiliation discourse.

The anti-French campaign triggered by the Laoxikai incident took place at a time when different narratives of the nation competed, each drawing on different traditions and inspirations, and supported by different interests, and each implying a different future for China. The campaign accelerated the emergence of a national identity based on the discourse of humiliation. On a broad scale, the weakness of the Republican state in the face of a perceived foreign assault prompted local

⁶⁵ C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), ch. 6 and 462. See also Harrison, *China*, in which she describes a modernization of nationalism. For theoretical argument, see Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism* (Palgrave, 2000).

grassroots elements to mobilize the “nation” to lend support when power politics constrained the state from acting. Using traditional networks, new communications technology, and the discourse of citizenship, they attempted to spread a message that invoked national shame as a means of mobilizing nationwide support for a local issue. Local dynamics fed into the emerging discourse too, for a need for “solidarity” in the face of a foreign threat legitimized coercion, which invoked “shame” to force a national identity upon those who did not have one. Physical violence, though limited in the Laoxikai case, also foreshadowed the way a compulsory national identity would later assert itself as the supreme identity, culminating in the violence of mass mobilization under Mao. Thus on both the macro and micro level, the anti-French campaign contributed to the emergence of a discourse of national humiliation, which became dominant after the May Fourth Incident of 1919. The feeling of shame excited in the anti-French campaign did not achieve its goals of reclaiming Laoxikai, but its contribution to the growth of the national humiliation discourse lived on.

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