

The State Formation of Late Qing China within Global Geopolitical Dynamics

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Abstract: This article views the nineteenth-century Qing government's acceptance of modern state logics as a momentous occasion in the government-led modern state transition amid pressure from across the geopolitical landscape. In the process of this transition, the Qing government strove to adopt the rules of the interstate system, such as border demarcation and the system of international law, which were fine-tuned to the politico-economic expansion of the modern world-system. Perspective builds on theories of China's process of incorporation into the modern world-system; however, it is qualitatively different from previous approaches such as the impact-response approach or the colonial perspective in that it is based on an understanding of global geopolitics as a transnational entity and, as such, a unit of analysis. Global geopolitics first appeared in Western Europe, but as it expanded into non-European areas, its logics gradually became global logics that encompassed European and non-European practices alike. This paper makes two significant theoretical contributions. First, from a macroscopic perspective, it suggests that the global connected histories between Western Europe and China can be examined without excluding the distinctive dynamics of either Europe or China. Second, by using global geopolitics as a unit of analysis, it argues that the role of the Qing government is as important as the influence of Western colonial powers in the formation of the modern Chinese state. This approach challenges the Eurocentric perspective that considers European powers to be active and progressive and China to be passive and lethargic.

Keywords: interstate system, demarcation, international law, modern world-system, nineteenth-century China

Introduction

A Long Journey to Seek Global Geopolitics in the Debate on Modern State Formation in China

The purpose of this article is to explain Qing China's transition to modern statehood after the nineteenth century. I trace how this process of modern state formation was shaped through global geopolitical dynamics. To that end, the article consists of four sections. First, before delving into the state formation of Qing China, I will briefly review the existing literature that examines the modern state formations and transformations of Qing China and the Republican period. Next, I will briefly explain my theoretical framework for China's incorporation process, which allows for the analysis of the relationships between China and global geopolitics in the nineteenth century. Third, I will present two points of historical evidence

behind China's state-building project that were caused by the acceptance of the interstate system rules of the modern world-system: a restructured demarcation and the acceptance of international law. Finally, I will summarize my arguments, discuss my contributions, and assess this research.

I begin with two important questions. First, in their transition to a modern state, were Qing China or Republican China influenced by the outside world? Second, was China's transformation into a modern state a similar process to that experienced by Western countries? These questions have attracted numerous scholarly discussions and debates. So far, many social scientists and historians have shown interest in intrinsic development or have used a China-centered perspective when examining China's transition to a modern state.

First, social scientists have contended that China's state-building projects were initiated after the fall of the Qing Empire. For instance, Strauss (1998) pointed out that China's institutional foundations were established during the Republican period (1912–49). Myers (2000) compared the state-building plans of the Beiyang military regime with those of the nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek. In a comparative context and with a longer perspective, Wong (1997) argued that the state-making logics of late imperial China were not identical to those of Europe. While introducing the institutional reform of Qing China's intellectuals—such as Wei Yuan, Feng Guifen, Yang Dapeng, Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Zhang Binglin—Kuhn (2002) explained how Qing China's modern state had been formed since the 1790s. This perspective contextualizes the formation of a modern Chinese state within the long-term continuation of China's history and has gathered some momentum in recent studies. Notably, Thornton (2007) stressed the importance of finding a genuine, unique, and long-lasting tradition of Chinese state-making, distinct from that of Western Europe, which was mainly composed of coercive and repressive institutional capacities. According to Thornton (2007: 4), Chinese state-making is described as the rise of a moral agent that seeks “not only to impose a particular moral order within which the state can claim primacy but also to make the presence of the state at the center of that totalizing vision.”

Second, from a more microscopic approach, some historians have examined national identity through China's geography and cartography in the early modern period. Influenced partially by the theories of postcolonialists such as Hevia (1995; 1998; 2003) and Liu (2004), who have debunked the Eurocentrism embedded in the discourse on modern state formation and colonial expansion, Hostetler (2001) and Teng (2004) regarded the wars of conquest in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Burma and the territorial expansion of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as equivalent to European colonial expansion. Furthermore, they pointed to how Jesuit missionaries were involved in the mapping of the Qing empire in the seventeenth century as historical evidence for a global connection between Qing China and the West.¹ This allows for the recognition that Westernized ideas and scientific skills or techniques were significantly reflected in the maps of the Qing empire (see Cams 2017). Hostetler (2009; 2013) extended this view in striving to find historical clues of Qing China's transition to a modern state by comparing Qing empire maps with world maps and identifying the scientific and modern characteristics of Chinese maps.

The aforementioned studies have emphasized China's internal dynamics in the formation of a modern Chinese state. This approach, however, tends to fall into the epistemological quagmire of a China-centered view. For instance, Larsen (2008) interpreted the relationship between Qing China and Chosŏn in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century as an extension strategy of Qing imperialism. In contrast with the predominant conception that considers nineteenth-century China a victim of Western colonialism, Larsen (2008: 7) insisted that the Qing empire tried to maintain "its large multi-ethnic empire" during the nineteenth century. In addition, Larsen (8) offered a new interpretation of nineteenth-century China's role in the world-economy, writing that "China in particular appears to have been far more significant, even central, to the functioning of the world economy" and that "China has rejoined the stream of world history as an equal." Larsen's interpretation of Qing China is thought provoking, but his overstatement regarding late Qing China tends to exclude the Qing government's abjection caused by colonial penetrations in the nineteenth century. Although Hostetler (2009) suggested a hybrid approach, he also had a strong tendency to think of eighteenth-century Qing China as the center of the global world. This evidently resulted in another form of Sinocentrism, or "Orientalism in reverse." Reverse Orientalism is the opposite of Orientalism; it is a distorted narrative created by the East. It often espouses Asian culture, tradition, economy, and politics and, furthermore, portrays Asian values and civilizations as absolute and divine while ignoring the impact of the West or the connected histories of the West and the East (Yun 2014: 177). To avoid this Orientalism in reverse, we should not disregard the influence of the West on East Asian countries, nor should we conflate the developmental paths of each East Asian country (Ru 2020a: 268).

Unlike historians, comparative historical sociologists have argued that China's modern state formation developed in a fundamentally different way from that of European modern state formation. Additionally, they have often assumed that China was not transformed into a modern state until at least the nineteenth century. In the socio-political context of the origins of the modern state, Max Weber's (1958: 78) idea that "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" contributed to defining the definitive characteristics of the modern state and tracing the historical roots of the Western European states. The modern state in European society, which is defined as "a set of autonomous institutions exercising supreme political authority within a [geographically defined] territory" (Harris 2012: 11), created a highly advanced bureaucratic administration with rationally defined rules and regulations. However, according to comparative historical sociologists, the rise of the modern state as a new form of government in a given society can only be applied to advanced Western European countries.

Regarding the modern state formation of Western Europe, Tilly (1975: 27) showed how, from the sixteenth century onward, the absolute states of Western Europe shared several features. First, the state continuously controlled the territories with certain boundaries. Second, political power was relatively centralized. Third, the state was institutionally and ontologically separated from other organizations in society. Fourth, the state monopolized the centralized means of violence.

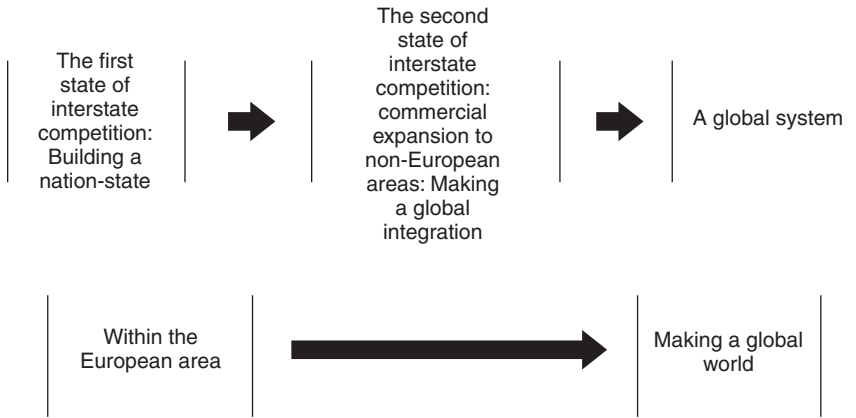


Figure 1. Diagrammatic representation of an analytical framework of the West's modern state transition.

According to Tilly (1985), powerful Western European monarchies eliminated rivals within their own territories while forming a vast governmental apparatus to establish a nation-state. For instance, the Tudor monarchs of England launched the process of demilitarizing the nobility, and Louis XIII of France initiated the disarmament of the rebel nobles while protecting citizens against external foes. Under this form of rule, wherein people had the right to safety from external attacks as a trade-off for abandoning the means of violence, each European monarch was able to successfully eliminate all rivals in his territory and become the sole holder of military power until the late eighteenth century. Internally, by monopolizing the means of violence, the governmental apparatuses in Western Europe successfully disarmed the nobles. Externally, each European country was able to build up military strength to check and overcome rival countries or to destroy their rivals under the pretext of protecting their own citizens against outside enemies. Striving for the merits of power within an expanding territory paved the way to the reinforcement of the European countries' war-making capability, consequently leading those countries to fall into unprecedented economic and military competition, including war (Finer 1975). This fragmented interstate system brought about competition among the European states, which served as a watershed for the Great Divergence (Arrighi 2009; Giddens 1985).

Such interstate competition, triggered by the simultaneous growth of the nation-state in Western Europe, had no parallel; however, this competition was not limited to European territories (fig. 1). At a time when European countries were scrambling to turn themselves into modern states, they had an eye on new lands, ever since Portugal opened a new route for the spice trade and gained enormous economic profits from it (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu 2015). The success of long-distance sea trade led by Portugal spurred other European countries onto politico-commercial expansion (Wallerstein 1974). In particular, the inseparable

connection between commercial benefits and the development of military forces in Western Europe paved the way for creating and expanding the global system—defined as a global integration project (Baran and Sweezy 1966; Cipolla 1965). This served as a turning point for a new era of Europe, which expanded beyond European territory—that is, the formation of European colonies abroad was directly or indirectly connected to the formation of nation-states at home.

This discourse suggests that the transition to modern statehood in Western Europe was closely related to the rise of the global system. However, as previously mentioned, this is a distinctive developmental pattern of Western Europe. Only Western European countries conducted colonial expansion and created the global system, and they enjoyed first mover advantages such as Western-oriented norms and principles in international law in this global system, at least for a while. To put it differently, the rise of the modern state in Western Europe must be qualitatively different from the formation of modern states in non-Western European regions, given that, after the rise of the global system, Western European powers had a significant impact on the politics, economies, and societies of non-European regions during their transition to modern states.

Comparative historical sociologists believe that defining the particular historical path of northwestern European countries as a starting point for the rise of the modern state (or the transition to modern statehood) is not a teleological assumption. Of course, they hardly deny the fact that, before the colonial expansion of European powers reached Asia in the late nineteenth century, the prototype of the modern state had already formed in some Asian countries—that is, the golden age of Asian countries enabled those countries to develop some of the logics of a modern state. Yet, to borrow the term from Goldstone (2002: 342), it was merely a “periodic efflorescence.” Despite positive signs of modern state formation, many Asian countries, including Qing China, did not enter a new phase in their transition to modern statehood on their own. This was due not only to strong opposition from traditional socio-political structures and ideology but also to unexpected penetrations from the European colonial powers. For instance, Qing China accepted and used Westernized, modernized scientific techniques in mapping its territory in the eighteenth century, but this did not last. Moreover, due to a series of large and small rebellions—the White Lotus Rebellion of 1795–1804, the Taiping Rebellion of 1850–64, the Nien Rebellion in the northern region from 1851 to 1868, the Du Wenxiu Rebellion in Western Yunnan from 1856 to 1872, and the Dungan revolts (or Muslim rebellions) in Shaanxi, Gangsu, and Ningxia from 1862 to 1877—the rise of traditional sociopolitical forces such as *qingyi* 清議,² and the penetrations of European colonial powers in the nineteenth century, the Qing government could not afford to seek internal transformation toward a modern state.

The explanations offered by comparative historical sociologists seem neat and convincing, but they are problematic in three ways. First, although those sociologists are keenly interested in the formation of the modern state in Western Europe, it is still questionable whether they are equally interested in the formation of the modern state in China. Second, in connection with the first problem,

comparative historical sociologists are predisposed to a Eurocentric perspective. While depending heavily on the fixed European path to modern state formation, tied to notions of Europe's great divergence, they have paid little attention to the dynamics of countries in non-European areas. For instance, Ming China meticulously and carefully monitored the rise of rival countries such as Japan and the Manchus just as carefully as the Western European countries checked their rival countries. Nonetheless, many tended to see such European interstate competition as a unique historical case while downplaying similar historical cases in East Asia.

Third, as an even bigger problem, comparative historical sociologists lack an understanding of global geopolitics. Despite increasing attention to modern state formation in non-European regions, they still evince a strong tendency to define different developmental paths for the West and for China. Even if the predominant assumption of comparative historical researchers can be accepted—namely, the idea that global geopolitics was initiated by Western Europe—ignoring the complicated responses and practices of non-European countries in global geopolitical dynamics causes a serious logical problem. Indeed, the principles of global geopolitics did not remain European-oriented but became global as European colonialism expanded to non-European areas—that is, the logics of global geopolitics had been moving toward a more integrated concept that encompassed both European and non-European practices.

In sum, many studies have stressed different aspects in illustrating China's modern state formation but have failed to provide a theoretical framework for understanding China's transition to modern statehood as initiated by global geopolitical dynamics. In contrast to such studies that obscure the existence of global geopolitical power, I argue that Qing China's first step in modern state formation in the nineteenth century was caused by the dynamics of global geopolitics.

A Global Geopolitics Framework for Understanding China's Modern State Formation

Within the field of historical sociology and history, there has been a recent trend of increasingly critical views of methodological nationalism or Europe-oriented internationalism (Pitts 2018: 13). This, in turn, has prompted more scholars to begin examining the idea of globality (Go and Lawson 2017). Colonial powers and non-European areas are no exception. In the context of the transnational framework, neither colonial powers nor non-European areas can be considered everlasting and invariable concepts; rather, they can be formulated and reformulated and understood as a part of the global system. Following this perspective, I will examine nineteenth-century China's state formation within global geopolitics. In particular, to combine global geopolitics and China's state formation, I will use a theoretical framework for China's process of incorporation into the modern world-system.

The modern world-system, which was created by Europe's geopolitical dynamics, penetrated China and brought about radical political changes to the Qing government (Wallerstein 1990: 15); a theoretical framework for the incorporation process, derived from world-systems analysis, allows us to understand China's

transition to modern statehood. According to Ru (2020b), the Qing empire was a world empire before the nineteenth century. However, the Qing empire had begun to establish Westernized political apparatuses such as Zongli yamen 總理衙門 (Office for the General Management of Affairs Concerning the Various Countries) and accept Westernized state concepts such as sovereignty (*zhuquan* 主權) or the state (*guo* 國) since its incorporation into the modern world-system.

It seems that this narrative of the global system makes it difficult to know how to contextualize locality or Chinese history; however, emphasizing the global system does not mean paying less attention to historical dynamics at the local level. Instead, the interest in the global system is an epistemological attempt to connect it with local history, given that globally connected histories are embedded in global geopolitical dynamics and can be promoted as “various dialogical-and dialectical-global concepts” (Hobson 2017: 226).

Using global geopolitics as a unit of analysis, what are the characteristics of China’s transition to modern statehood? First, China’s transition was not shaped by internal dynamics.³ Unlike past studies that opted for “methodological internalism” (Lin 2012: 450), I argue that China’s transition to modern statehood was initiated by the penetration of global geopolitics.

Second, given that China’s transition to modern statehood was not a clone of the European modern case but a result of global geopolitical dynamics, the state formation of Qing China followed a different historical path than that of Western Europe. Here, I make it a proviso that when colonial powers invaded China and imposed modern state logics in the nineteenth century, China, as an empire, gradually declined while taking the initial steps toward modern statehood. Third, the penetrations of colonial powers no doubt kicked off the first steps in China’s formation as a modern state. However, the encroachment of European colonial powers does not mean that China had been entirely exploited and thus became underdeveloped, nor does it mean that China was helplessly and passively attacked by colonial powers. On the contrary, the penetration of the colonial powers became a strong stimulus that shook and undermined the premodern political systems of the empire. In addition, the Chinese state’s active response to colonial encroachment became a springboard toward the development of the modern state. Unlike many other Asian countries that had been transformed into European colonies after the sixteenth century, China did not become a colony. To borrow Cohen’s phrasing ([1984] 2010: 134), China was a “semi-colony.” Accordingly, China began to take steps toward becoming a modern state without a single Western power’s colonial rules (Flint and Zhang 2019: 312). This caused the existence of antinomic experiences (i.e., compulsion by the West and autonomy by China) during China’s transition to modern statehood.

Considering that the transition to modern statehood in nineteenth-century China was related to the dynamics of global geopolitics, I will offer two points of historical evidence for China’s transition to modern statehood: drawing lines of demarcation and accepting international law. I argue that, after the defeat of the Opium Wars, China had to follow global geopolitical rules, including drawing national border lines and consenting to international law, which led to China’s

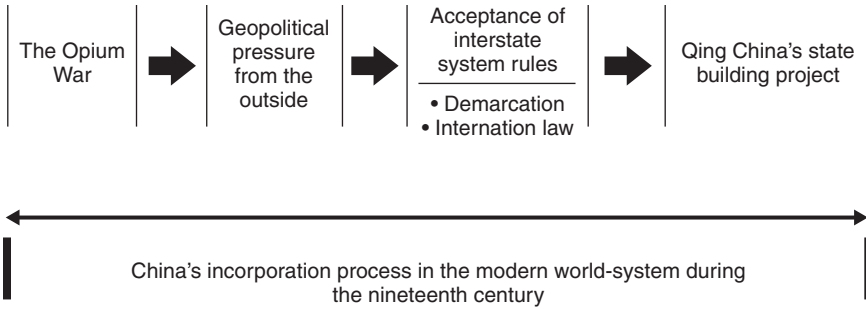


Figure 2. Diagrammatic representation of an analytical framework of China's modern state transition.

transition to modern statehood (fig. 2). However, unlike the transitions of advanced European countries, China's transition became more complicated by the interventions of the colonial powers. To explicate the influence of these entangled colonial powers in China's transition to modern statehood, I will present China's active and passive responses to these influences.

After the Opium Wars: Acceptance of Interstate System Rules

The colonial powers' encroachment on late imperial China began in earnest after the Opium Wars. The abject defeat of Qing China in the First Opium War led to radical changes in the international situation of the East Asian region as well as unprecedented politico-economic transformations for the Qing government (Fairbank 1987; Perkins 2013; Platt 2018), despite ominous signs of the confrontations between Qing China and Britain, such as the Lady Hughes incident in 1784 and Adm. William Drury's occupation of Macao in 1808. Thus, some Chinese had an inkling of the threat Britain posed before the First Opium War. This was nothing less than a revolutionary change for the Qing government. China was at a tipping point, which formed the prologue to Qing China's entry into the interstate system of the modern world-system.

Although Qing China did not become a British colony after the Opium Wars, the Qing regime was unable to fully stave off European colonial penetration, including from Russia. Deeply frightened by the advanced navies of the European powers, Qing China was infused with a feeling of anxiety as China sank to the status of a weak and underdeveloped country within the Western-dominated world order. To prevent China from being left behind, the Qing government strove to make a state border and accept international law as a practice of diplomacy.

A Restructured Demarcation: Making a State Border

State-making is often called "state formation" in the interstate system logics of the modern world-system (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986). This occurs when the external arena is incorporated into the modern world-system. This theoretical perspective focuses on Qing China's transition to modern statehood, initiated

by the penetration of interstate system logics. Within the structural pressure of global geopolitics that “gives rise to an inequality of power” (Agnew 2009: 25) and presses states to follow the rules of state boundaries (Agnew 2005), Qing China also had to discipline itself by following interstate system rules during its incorporation process. Based on this theoretical framework, the Qing government’s demarcation project, influenced by the colonial powers, can be identified as a self-directed change as part of the state-making process.

The territorial sovereignty of the modern state must satisfy the basic requirement of “the demarcation of its territory,” in that “the territorially sovereign form of the modern nation is shaped by the global system of nation-states” (Duara 1995: 81). In describing the modern state that evolved historically in the West, one of the central characteristics has been border control (Sahlins 1989).⁴ To initiate border control, a demarcation project is essential because controlling borders requires the setting of boundaries. At the world-system level, demarcation was a geographic (re)drawing of the earth’s surface that restructured the territorial space of the incorporated areas imposed by interstate system logics. This indicates that the demarcation project of an incorporated area is not an autonomous, natural, or given history. Rather, it was intentionally designed by the pressures of interstate system rules. Here, I mean to distinguish the boundaries of the modern state from those of the Chinese empire insofar as the modern state tends to claim a specified locus of sovereignty and self-legitimizing boundary lines through negotiations with neighboring countries and the fortification of border defenses while rejecting overlapping or blurred concepts of the border area that were sustained by the Chinese empire’s universal rules or cultural assimilation policies. In this case, the border of the modern state was formed out of the Chinese empire’s conception of its boundaries.

Considering that the demarcation project provided important momentum for turning the Qing empire into a modern state, the historical narrative of the demarcation project is important. Based on the assumption that the maneuverability of the modern world-system induced—or sometimes forced—incorporated areas to establish their territorial boundaries, I now turn to how China’s territorial boundaries were constituted.⁵

It was not until the beginning of incorporation that Qing China realized the importance of territorial boundaries. As Woodside (2007) explicitly noted, Qing emperors had an unfavorable view of border areas until the late nineteenth century. For both Qing rulers and bureaucrats, border areas were portrayed negatively—for example, as a site for banishment. Thus, they were often considered spaces “that generated cycles of crisis and catastrophe” (Woodside 2007: 21). More importantly, before beginning China’s incorporation process, the Qing empire did not need to draw clear territorial boundary lines. Indeed, the Qing regime expressed concern about drawing concrete boundary lines. When the Jesuits mapped the territories of the Kangxi emperor, traditionalists were appalled because they reduced the Middle Kingdom to the status of its neighbors (Palat 1999). For this reason, it is hardly surprising that the boundaries of Qing China as a world empire were discontinuous, nonbounded, and poorly defined (Winichakul 1994).



Figure 3. The Hami region in the *Qianlong neifu yutu* 清乾隆內府輿圖. Source: Guofang Yanjiuyuan 1964.

Finding the borders was difficult even when the Qing Empire expanded its territories from the late seventeenth century through the mid-eighteenth century. For instance, the Qianlong emperor (ca. 1735–96) personally went on a foreign expedition and led a successful campaign from 1747 to 1791. Over fifty years, he moved to conquer “the Zunghar, Ili, and Muslim campaigns (1755–59), two wars to suppress rebellious Jinchuan minorities in [the] Sichuan province (1747–49, 1771–76), wars in Burma (1766–70), Annam (Vietnam, 1788–89), and Taiwan (1787–88), and two wars against the Gurkhas in Nepal (1790–92)” (Waley-Cohen 1996: 869–70) and prevailed in all these wars of conquest over this period.

These successful conquests and the incorporation of new frontiers brought changes to China’s borders. The Qing government was thus proactive in producing maps to identify its expanded territorial borders. After the Xinjiang area was incorporated into Qing territory in 1760, the emperor Qianlong created the *Qianlong neifu yutu* 清乾隆內府輿圖 (see fig. 3). To include the detailed

topographical surface of the Hami region on the map, the Qing government dispatched Western missionaries to survey it.

Additionally, the Kashgar (Kashigaer 喀什噶爾), Tashkent (Tashigan 塔什干), and Samarkand (Samaerhan 撒馬爾罕) regions were represented on the *Qing dai yitong ditu* 清代一統地圖, which replaced the *Qianlong neifu yutu*. This map even showed the Arctic Ocean (Beibingyang 北冰洋) to the north, the Indian Ocean to the south, and the Baltic Sea (Boluodehai 波羅的海編輯), Mediterranean Sea, and Red Sea to the west.

Although the Qing empire had expanded its territories through a series of wars of conquest, the new boundary lines represented on the map were ill defined and vague. Rather than present an accurate demarcation of Qing territory, Qing maps emphasized the farthest point of the territory over which it ruled. This was primarily intended to show off the Qing empire's power as a part of its empire-building techniques and to serve a particular political purpose: the governance of imperial territory. To do so, the Qing empire was cautious about drawing distinct and clear boundary lines because the basic principle of Qing international relations was the integration of heterogeneity. This meant that the Qing empire's drawing of its territorial boundaries and control over its borders proceeded to establish a universal and united China-centered world. The Qing empire's strategy of incorporating political heterogeneity thus explains why the Qing empire's frontier borders were loose and blurry.

From the 1840s, however, the Qing empire was unable to sustain its policies because it encountered territorial disputes with foreign powers and suffered from the dissolution of its imperial territory (Mosca 2013).⁶ Among Qing China's territorial disputes during its incorporation process were border disputes with Russia that reversed the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) and the Treaty of Kyakhta (1727). This resulted in Qing China ceding its own lands. The Qing empire had vied with Russia for centuries to control border areas such as Turkestan and the Amur River basin, sometimes achieving politico-military dominance over Russia. It encountered heavy pressure from Britain and France from 1858 to 1860, and Russia had the opportunity to transform itself from a rival empire to a colonial power that was able to force the Qing government to accept unequal terms (Crossley 2010). Under the terms of the Treaty of Aigun (Aihuntiaoyue 璦琿條約) in 1858 and the Convention of Peking (Beijing tiaoyue 北京條約) in 1860, Russia acquired about 1 million square kilometers in the lands of the Amur region.

Russia's territorial expansion to the Chinese borderlands had not yet finished. The nineteenth-century northwestern border disputes between the Qing empire and Russia revolved around Russian frontier expansion and Qing China's responses to it. After the Convention of Peking, Russia proposed a joint expedition to confirm the border with northwestern Qing China. On the surface, Russia's proposal to demarcate boundaries did not seem to reflect a political intention for territorial expansion. In reality, however, Russia intended to expand its eastern frontier areas. In response to Russia's proposal, the Qing government appointed Ming Yi 明誼 (1792–1868), the highest-ranking military officer in the outer Mongolia region,

and Ming Xu 明緒 (?–1866), a minister in the political district of Xinjiang, to a delegation to negotiate with Russia. Different from border disputes resolved by previous treaties, such as the Treaty of Aigun and the Convention of Peking, this dispute was considered by the Qing regime to be an important matter of national security. This increasing attention to border disputes between Qing China and Russia can be confirmed by examining Qing diplomatic documents: “[The] Temurtu-nor and Zaysan-nor [regions] are both located in Qing’s *kalun* 卡倫 (guard post). If Russia incorporates both Temurtu-nor and Zaysan-nor . . . it not only takes large territories of Qing but also has [the] *kalun* of [the] Qing armies. It consequently makes it difficult to thwart invasions from Russia. And those who live in the Temurtu-nor and Zaysan-nor [regions] face a serious foreign intrusion” (*Chouban yiwu shimo*, 4:17–19).

For this reason, Prince Gong earnestly asked Ming Yi to prepare for the negotiations, telling him, “[You can’t] cause conflict, and you need to deal with [the] border negotiation in a serious and safe manner. To defeat Russia’s territorial invasion, you need to watch how the negotiation process for border disputes develops” (*Chouban yiwu shimo*, 4:20).

The Qing government’s original plan for a cautious and unhurried approach to the border disputes, however, was seriously disturbed by Russia’s ambition of forceful incorporation policies and the Muslim revolts. In August 1863, Russian and Chinese delegations met for the demarcation of borders, even as Russian armies were dispatched to the Boluo Lake, Jier Kajia, and the bank of the Tuergen River. Furthermore, the Muslim revolts had spread to the entire Xinjiang area, resulting in the Qing empire losing control of Urumqi. This unexpected disorder in border regions, as well as Russia’s armed intervention, pushed China to negotiate border matters as a matter of urgency (*Chouban yiwu shimo*, 19:16–17). Faced with such threats, the Qing government could not postpone border negotiations with Russia. China and Russia signed the Treaty of Tarbagatai (Tachengjiyue 塔城界約, 1864), resulting in Russia gaining vast territories, including the eastern region of Lake Balkhash, the Zaysan-nor region, and Lake Issyk-kul. Russia not only expanded its borders in Central Asia but also incorporated Mongolia and many Cossack tribes.

After successfully suppressing the Muslim revolts in 1871, the Qing government attempted to renegotiate its western borders. To recover its lost territories, the Qing regime appointed Chonghou 崇厚 (1826–93) as a delegate to Russia. Chonghou, however, hastily signed the Treaty of Livadia (1879) without the permission of the Qing government. According to this treaty, the Qing regime had to pay indemnities to Russia. Worse, Qing China also had to cede the vast lands of West Ili and the land along the Tekes River to Russia in exchange for the return of Ili.⁷ After the Qing government realized the extent of Chonghou’s disastrous border negotiations, it planned to withdraw from the Treaty of Livadia. In January 1880, the Qing emperor sent Russia a message that the Qing government could not ratify the Treaty of Livadia. To renegotiate the borderlines of the Ili area, the Qing government dispatched diplomat Zeng Jize 曾紀澤 (1839–1890) to Russia. He was able to forge a new border agreement, the so-called Treaty of Saint Petersburg, in July

1881. From the Chinese position, this treaty was progress. Qing China regained the eastern part of the Ili basin area, including the Tekes Valley, even though it did not recover its territories entirely. After re-demarcating the borders, the Qing government produced a map with the old and new borders of Ili between Qing China and Russia (Yili Zhong-Exinjiu jiehe tu 伊犁中俄新舊界合圖), reflecting the new border established by the Treaty of Saint Petersburg.

The border disputes with Russia did not end. Although China had ceded territory in the Amur region, Russia intended to continue expanding its territory and had conflicts with China in the border regions. Regarding Russia's insatiable territorial expansion, China found it necessary to prepare for border defense not only in Jilin but also in Heilongjiang province (Morley 1965: 12). To defend the military front of Manchuria, China even built fortified positions at Khun-ch'un (Hunchun 琿春) for the first time, which reflected the Qing's strong will to defend its borders. In short, the demarcation and re-demarcation of the borders between China and Russia and the Qing government's foreign and military measures taken for border defense show how the Qing government was dedicated to drawing clear borders, where earlier they had been ill-defined, and defending them. Such attention to borders represents a continuous effort to turn the Qing empire into a modern state that was contextualized within the interstate system.

Russia was not the only encroacher; European countries also watched thirstily for a chance to acquire the borderlands of Yunnan Province, located in southwestern Qing territory. This also caught the attention of the Qing regime. The Qing government did not rule Yunnan's borderlands directly, though these border territories belonged to Qing China. In place of direct rule, the Qing government gave the leaders of indigenous tribes a degree of administrative autonomy (under the *tusi* 土司 system). In this regard, Yunnan's borderlands could be seen as "a dynamic overlapping border that was continuously remolded by a fluid web of power relations at the local level" (Bussche 2014: 9). This governing practice, however, had different characteristics from the logics of the interstate system that emphasized securing a fixed and clear demarcation of the border. Britain's colonial expansion reached the Yunnan borderlands at the end of the nineteenth century, representing a critical turning point in Qing China's border control.

Britain's aggressive geographical expansion into the border areas of the Yunnan region led to a border dispute. Since the 1870s, Britain had made inroads into the Yunnan, Tibet, and Xinjiang regions of Qing China's western frontier, keeping the Qing regime on its toes. In 1874, Britain dispatched an expeditionary force to the border areas between Burma and Qing China. This expeditionary force, led by Horace Browne (1832–1914), numbered about two hundred explorers, including Augustus Raymond Margary (1846–75); it was dispatched by the British embassy to explore overland trade routes between British India and Qing China. The expeditionary force was stopped by armed local Chinese populations and had to return to Burma. In 1875, on the way to Shanghai from Bhamo, Margary and his staff were murdered on the orders of local officials. The British government exercised diplomatic pressure on the Qing government under the pretext of arranging adequate compensation for these deaths.

In order to respond to the British government's requests and to identify Britain's unruly activities in the borderlands of the Yunnan region, the Qing government dispatched Xue Fucheng 薛福成 (1838–94), the Qing government's ambassador to Britain. Xue realized how vulnerable the border areas of the Yunnan region were to geographical penetrations by the British. However, he allowed British officers to enter the Chinese border areas because he dreaded a military confrontation. This idea was at least partially reflected in the negotiation process, which ended with the Chefoo Convention (Yantaitiaoyue 煙臺條約, 1876) between Britain and Qing China. Under this agreement, the Qing government had to issue pass cards when British officers asked to investigate trading routes and trading conditions between India and Tibet and for travel not only from Beijing to India by way of Tibet but also from India or the border areas of Tibet into Tibet (Hu 1981).

With this agreement in place, Britain could dispatch surveyors and cartographers to produce maps. The British government's cartographic efforts created tension over the borders between Qing China and Britain's colonies. As a result of Britain's demarcation project, the Qing government had to draw upon Westernized geographic concepts in response to border disputes in Tibet in 1890: "Article III: The Government of Great Britain and Ireland and the Government of China engage reciprocally to respect the boundary as defined in Article I and to prevent acts of aggression from their respective sides of the frontier" (Parliament of Great Britain, 1894).

In conclusion, Qing China's border demarcation was an important part of its transformation from a world empire to a modern state. By using the logics of demarcation, I have tried to show how Qing China continuously transformed its borders from those of a world empire to those of a modern state. Such a transformation was an inevitable corollary of China's incorporation into the interstate system of the modern world-system. However, the border demarcation projects of Qing China, which began in earnest in the nineteenth century, were not passive responses to global geopolitical pressure; rather, Qing China actively coped with the changing geopolitical circumstances by redefining its own territories. This was an effort by the Qing regime to transition toward a modern state.

In analyzing China's process of incorporation into the modern world-system, another key issue was the acceptance of international law. In the next section, I discuss how accepting international law was specifically related to the rules of the interstate system, which resulted in creating dynamics of political change.

Acceptance of International Law (Wanguogongfa 萬國公法)

Ever since Francisco de Vitoria used the term of *jus inter gentis* ("law between the peoples"), international law has been interpreted as the law of the international community, used as a practice or norm for coordinating cross-border interests. Many international law scholars have analyzed how Western European state formation was related to the rise of the international law system. As the politico-economic expansion of the European powers began in earnest in the eighteenth century, scholars have also paid keen attention to the question of how the international legal system was exploited as an institutional and epistemological tool to represent the superiority of Western civilization.

Recently, the concept of Europe-centered international law has been challenged. Some have pointed out that international law was not created solely through European tradition or legacy. Instead of accepting Europe as a pioneer of international law, they argue that non-European countries also made important contributions to the principles of international law. Among the new explanations, Benton (2010) stressed that European legacies and practices alone did not create a global legal regime. Rather, it was through the involvement of non-European areas and interactions between European powers and non-European countries that the structure of the global legal regime could be invented and developed. In addition, the extraterritorial privileges of European colonial powers in non-European areas were not a unique phenomenon, since Qing China already had race-based extraterritorial privileges (Cassel 2012: 21). A prime example of such extraterritorial privileges is the Eight Banners' economic (e.g., receiving hedges against economic inflation), social (e.g., occupational benefits), and legal privileges (e.g., prohibition on corporal punishments during interrogation) (Elliott 2001: 197–202).

These explanations explicitly depart from a Eurocentric and teleological history that views Europe's original pedigree in international law as a universal value and norm that everyone should follow. However, this theoretical perspective tends to occlude the power that European countries exerted on non-European areas through the logics of Europe-oriented international laws. Although the debate over the degree of colonial powers' effects on nineteenth-century Chinese society has no clear conclusion and the roles of colonial powers in China's sociopolitical and economic modernization process were seldom straightforward and simple, it is undeniable that Western European countries formed unequal relationships with non-European countries through coercive colonial expansion and colonial powers gained a dominant position in the international legal system through these relationships. Simultaneously, as important as the legal imperium of European powers embedded in the international legal system was, the conventional understanding of international law (that is, the Eurocentric idea of international legal studies) must be avoided in terms of understanding the roles of non-European countries in the globalization process of international law. To do this, I use the logics of China's process of incorporation into the modern world-system as my theoretical framework to analyze the roles that China played in shaping global international law.

I also examine how Qing China remained in an advantageous position while following the principles of international law. Encountering increased global geopolitical pressure in the nineteenth century, Qing China had to accept Europe-oriented international logics. However, this does not mean that China's acceptance of international law was passive or that the colonial powers' invasion of China through the international law made it easier. Rather, I argue that China strove to gain equal status in the international community by using the logics of international law. As a representative example, I will explain the case of *Dagukou chuanbo shijian* 大沽口船泊事件 (disputes between ships at Dagou Forts). I examine how the Qing regime's acceptance and use of international law helped protect its interests and assert its own sovereignty. In doing so, I explore the following core questions: How can we understand China's acceptance of international law in the nineteenth century from

the perspective of China's process of incorporation into the modern world-system? How does this relate to China's transition into a modern state?

Since the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, the modern world-system's integration induced incorporated areas to accept international orders while changing previously established non-European regional orders. The modern world-system is assumed to be not only a particular way of organizing the international division of the labor system and capital but also a set of universal and standardized rules for a global community (King 1990). European international law is an effective way to reorient the long-standing orders of the incorporated areas (Wallerstein 1983: 57). Specifically, it transformed heterogeneous and isolated political systems of rule into a single, unitary form of interstate rule. Qing China also accepted the international legal system, which was a monumental change in terms of China's self-directed transformation (Lorca 2010; He 2017). On this subject, Wheaton (1866: 22) insisted that Qing China's acceptance of international law was "the most remarkable proof of the advance of Western civilisation in the [East]."

After the Opium Wars, the West's consistent underestimation of the Qing regime became retrograde; the Qing empire faced relentless penetration by the colonial powers and could no longer ignore their politico-economic aggression. Under growing pressure from the colonial powers, the Qing regime had to learn Western diplomatic norms and rules in order to play a far more active role in sustaining itself.

Such an acceptance of international law, however, did not reflect equal and nonhierarchical relationships among the states. Within the framework of international law, equal footing between strong and weak states seemed to be taken for granted. This assumption does not reflect reality, as "the powerful states breached international law with impunity" (Horowitz 2004: 449) while the weak states complied with the strong states' coercive diplomacy, particularly in times of conflict.

Additionally, the colonial powers' approach to Qing China stemmed not from a desire to create an equal trading partner or a relationship of comrades but rather from an objective of exploitation to maximize their own politico-economic benefits. This meant that the interstate system of the capitalist world economy induced Qing China to become a member by using techniques such as consent and coercion, which stemmed from the international legal system. Such practices were conducted to render a newly incorporated area submissive to the existing member states. These practices also encouraged—and sometimes forced—a newly incorporated area to learn the logics of the interstate system. In doing so, the newly incorporated areas were able to embody the values given by (or accepted from) the international legal system. To borrow the rhetoric of Robert W. Cox (1983), accepting the Wanguogongfa, in this sense, can be interpreted as Qing China's acquiescence to the hegemonic world order.

Given that the colonial powers' strong and persistent pressures placed Qing China on the defensive, the Qing government had no choice but to accept interna-

tional law (Zhaojie 2012). To prevent Qing China from becoming an unwitting colony of Western European countries, the Qing regime had to learn the diplomatic style of the West when it came to trivial affairs and serious conflicts alike—including weighty negotiations between European and non-European countries. In sum, international law functioned, intentionally or not, as a fundamental principle for the expansion of the international world order led by Western society, and Qing China's acceptance of international law represented a *de facto* recognition that Qing China had become a member of the interstate system.

This theoretical narrative seems to be negative and coercive. However, in the real world, the interactions between the colonial powers and Qing China sometimes generated opposite outcomes. In contrast to the view that unconditionally accepts the negative impact of colonial presence in Qing China and the passive portrayal of Qing China's transformations, I turn to the historical evidence of Qing China's active response to the West.

As an active response to the Western-oriented system of international law, the Qing government began with the 1866 translation of *Wheaton's Elements of International Law* (Wanguogongfa) into Chinese, resulting from formal and informal pressure from European colonial powers (Zarrow 2012). Prince Gong 奕訢 (1833–98) and reform-minded Chinese intellectuals and bureaucrats such as Duan Fang 端方 (1861–1911), Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), Zeng Jize 曾紀澤 (1839–90), and Zheng Guanying 鄭觀應 (1842–1923), who were at pains to prevent further aggressive penetrations by foreign countries, were enthusiastic about the idea of the *Wanguogongfa*. They acknowledged that ignorance of international law was a disadvantage for China in the political competition among nation-states (Yang 2011; Yin 2016). Fearful of being left behind, the Qing government translated the *Wanguogongfa* and began to assimilate Western-oriented international norms.

By the time the Qing government had finished translating and publishing the *Wanguogongfa*, China had applied it to its diplomatic conflicts with Prussia. The so-called disputes between ships at Dagou Forts was the case in which the Qing government used the *Wanguogongfa* to settle a diplomatic conflict (Wang 1985). In the spring of 1864, Prussia, which was allied with Austria, was at war with Denmark. During the war, G. von Rehfues (1818–94), the Prussian ambassador to Qing China, was scheduled to arrive in Beijing via Tianjin. While heading to Tianjin, he led the capture of three Danish ships near the port of Dagou (*Chouban yiwu shimo*, 26:29). This action triggered a diplomatic dispute between China and Prussia. The *Zongli yamen*, which was in charge of resolving this diplomatic conflict, protested against Prussia's misuse of power in accordance with the principles of the *Wanguogongfa*.

To identify the territorial waters of China, the Qing government borrowed the logics of the *Wanguogongfa* (Wheaton 1866: 256). After that, to prove that Prussia had illegally seized Danish ships in Chinese territory, the Qing government pointed to the principles of the *Wanguogongfa* (Wheaton 1866: 378, 521). Based on the norms of the *Wanguogongfa*, the Qing government pushed Prussia

into a corner. In effect, Prussia was at a disadvantage, as capturing Danish ships in Chinese waters went against international norms. Prussia could not secure a procedural justification for the capture of the Danish ships and backed down from its diplomatic conflict with Qing China. As a consequence, Prussia released all three Danish ships (*Chouban yiwu shimo*, 26:30). With a satisfactory resolution of the diplomatic conflict, the *Zongli yamen* reported the emperor's effective use of the *Wanguogongfa* on August 30, 1864 (*Chouban yiwu shimo*, 26:32). The disputes between ships at Dagou Forts, handled by the Qing government with diplomatic finesse, paved the way for enlightening Qing China about the importance of international law. It allowed the Qing government to accept international law. In sum, the importation, translation, and application of this book marked a turning point in Qing China's recognition of protocol, negotiating methods, the right of legation, and countries' right of self-preservation.

In addition, Chinese intellectuals and diplomats struggled to learn about the Western world in terms of making China competitive in international affairs that were governed by the law of the jungle. As Day (2018: 2) noted, "Qing missions and legations were responsible for a wide range of activities aimed at self-strengthening and minimizing the pernicious effects of foreign encroachment." To create new channels of information about Western geography, Lin Zexu 林则徐 (1785–1850) translated English books and articles into Chinese, including Hugh Murray's *The Encyclopedia of Geography*. Xu Jiayu 徐继畲 (1795–1873) also wrote a world geography book, *Yinghuan zhilue* 瀛环志略, which included a variety of maps of Western European countries as well as explanations about the culture and political systems of the Western world.

To recap, the interstate system's strategies of penetration through international law were effective in that Qing China accepted them and disciplined itself to become a member of the international political arena. This strongly implies that Qing China's international relations were gradually assimilated into the interstate system. However, the Qing government's translation, acceptance, and exploitation of Wheaton's *Wanguogongfa* was a proactive measure, even as the logics of imperial expansion were embedded in the *Wanguogongfa*.⁸

Conclusion

The multiple ways in which China attempted to transform itself into a modern state from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century have been puzzled over by generations of researchers. In light of their studies' paying increasing attention to China's transition to modern statehood, the lack of knowledge on the role of global geopolitics is all the more striking. To address the lacuna of global geopolitical dynamics in the debate over China's modern state formation, I have used a theoretical perspective for China's incorporation process into the modern world-system. Based on this framework, I have analyzed historical evidence concerning Qing China's border demarcation projects and acceptance of the international legal system.

Since the nineteenth century, Qing China faced global geopolitical pressure and started taking a new approach to its territorial boundaries. Specifically, as the

border areas became unstable, Qing China introduced more modern and Western forms of control (or surveillance) in order to protect the border areas. Indeed, Qing China was able to learn about new national and international concepts such as the sovereign state, the treaty system, and the international order by translating and accepting the logics of the *Wanguogongfa*. Approaching the issue from a global geopolitical angle, the *Wanguogongfa* can be understood as having provided a new epistemological paradigm for Qing China to accept the concept of a modern state in earnest.

My contributions to research on Qing China's modern state transition are twofold. First, I have provided an antithesis against the theoretical hypotheses that China's transition to modern statehood was formed through the same route as Western European countries'—through internal dynamics. In this paper, I have argued that China's transition toward modern statehood contrasted starkly with that of European countries. In this sense, I partially agree with comparative historical researchers who maintain that global geopolitics was invented by Western Europe; however, I do not claim that the logics of global geopolitics were composed mainly of European elements. Rather, I argue that the elements and roles of non-European regions have been as important as those of European countries in shaping the global geopolitical dynamics with the acceleration of European expansion into non-European areas. I also emphasized that a global historical narrative is more valuable than Sinocentric historical narratives. Few deny that past historical studies offer invaluable insights into the international connections of early modern China, but their narrow spatial scope and methodological nationalism tend to strengthen ethnocentrism while ignoring global geopolitical dynamics. In contrast to these studies, I have examined, within a global historical narrative, how China's modern state was formed.

Second, I have focused on the connected global histories between China and the West. I use China's incorporation process as one of the types of such history and have eschewed reliance on the colonial perspective or the impact-response approach. Unlike the colonial perspective, this paper examined the revolutionary changes of nineteenth-century China from multiple angles. This approach helps us understand how nineteenth-century Qing China's acceptance of geopolitical logics was not merely a lost age for Qing China but was, rather, the beginning stage of its formation as a modern state. I also took global geopolitics as a unit of analysis, unlike the cross-national relationships of the impact-response approach (Teng and Fairbank [1954] 1979). By doing so, I illustrated some aspects of what was experienced during nineteenth-century China's incorporation process—namely, China's border demarcation project and acceptance of international law.

This study has illustrated the complexities of nineteenth-century China's transition to modern statehood. However, I do not suggest that this is the end of research on China's formation as a modern state. Rather, this article illuminates further paths for research. I hope my research inspires more advanced and in-depth studies of China's modern state formation, along with new theoretical viewpoints, in the near future.

NOTES

This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2020S1A6A3A02065553).

1. Indeed, thanks to the Jesuits' outstanding negotiating skills, the Qing empire was able to sign the Treaty of Nerchinsk with Russia (Perdue 2010).

2. As a political organization with a tinge of conservatism, the *qingyi* stalwarts used various vehicles (e.g., official memorials, poems, essays, and folk songs) to enshrine lofty Confucian values while condemning anti-Confucian sentiment (Schwartz 1964; Cohen [1984] 2010: 40). The Confucian motivation of the *qingyi* turned into a criticism about foreign-inspired modernization policies after the Tianjin Massacre (Eastman 1965: 599).

3. This argument seems to oppose an idea of Paul A. Cohen ([1984] 2010), who foregrounded indigenous factors in China's historical development. While criticizing "the West's importance" and a static and parochial assumption of the "roles of the Western intrusion" in Chinese historiography (2, 5), he suggested considering a selective Westernization process or limited Western influence in analyzing Chinese history. However, my approach does not completely contradict Cohen's position, as he has confessed that "Chinese reform efforts in the last three decades of the nineteenth century were related to the impact of the West is beyond debate" (36). His main aim was not to exclude "the West's actual historical role" (5) but to redefine the meaning of the West in Chinese historical research. As another approach to Qing history, we might think of the New Qing History, which casts a new light on the dynamics of Qing empire and inner Asia while decentering Han Chinese historical perspectives (Di Cosmo 1999; Elliott 2014; Rawski 2001). In particular, New Qing History is compelling as a heuristic approach to the Qing empire (that is, as a way of seeking distinctive Qing legacies) and its international relations within inner Asia (or Eurasia). However, given that this article aims to analyze the connected global history and the geopolitical context surrounding the Qing empire in the nineteenth century, there is a key difference between New Qing History and my own approach. To make my research purpose clear, I will limit my empirical analysis to the relationships between global geopolitical dynamics and Qing China's state formation project in the nineteenth century.

4. Making a nation's boundaries is a social, cultural, and political process (Paasi 2005: 668). It can be recontextualized by external forces (see Moisiu and Paasi 2013) because "the standardization of space that accompanied European settlement" (Agnew 2005: 4) created a new political geography of the areas affected. By the same token, the drawing of the new boundaries in Qing China, which was shaped by the rules of the European colonial powers, can be understood within the transnational context: within the hierarchical network of the spatiality of power, the "core, peripheries, and semi-peripheries are linked together by flows of goods, people, and investment" (506).

5. Of course, when the Qing empire signed the Treaty of Nerchinsk with Russia in 1689, the Qing already used a Western-style conception of the border (Hostetler 2015: 303). In addition, after the Treaty of Neschinsk, the Kangxi emperor thought that the West should recognize a more accurate knowledge of Qing territory and consequently produced the Kangxi Atlas (Huangyu quanlan tu 皇輿全覽圖, 1718). Jesuit missionaries employed by the Qing regime applied Westernized cartographic techniques to create the Kangxi Atlas (Hostetler 2013: 18). Considering the Treaty of Nerchinsk and Kangxi Atlas as geopolitical practices embedded in the logics of the modern state, however, arouses a certain skepticism. Since the Kangxi Atlas was

created and subsequently kept in the office of the palace treasures, the cartographic practices of Chinese mapmakers followed Chinese methods rather than the modern Western method (Yee 1994: 187). This strongly implies that Western methods did not have much influence on realistic cartographic practices. Second, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the Sino-Russian border gained significant geopolitical attention (mainly due to railroad projects) and both China and Russia began to realize the importance of a “division of bordered lands in the modern sense” (Urbansky 2020: 2).

6. According to Yee (1994: 194–95), border disputes after the nineteenth century caused by external intrusions by colonial powers made Qing reformers interested in European mapping techniques.

7. For border maps between China and Russia (Xibei Zhong-Edieci fenjie to fu 西北中俄迭次分界圖附) created by the Treaty of Livadia, see Chen (2008 287–88).

8. When European international law was translated into Chinese, the European-centered view was not totally preserved. As Liu (1995: 26) has shown, translingual practices are not one sided; rather, these can be interpreted as a hybrid process encompassing political and ideological collisions between the guest language and the host language. Translingual practices thus created or solved cultural, political, and ideological differences between the host language and the guest language. China was no exception. In the translation and acceptance of international law in nineteenth-century China, the social, cultural, and political values of China and Europe were mixed together.

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