Modern China

From a Hierarchy in Time to a Hierarchy in Space: The Meanings of Sino-Babylonianism in Early Twentieth-Century China

Tze-ki Hon

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://mcx.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/36/2/139

Published by:
$SAGE

http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for *Modern China* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://mcx.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://mcx.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations http://mcx.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/36/2/139

From a Hierarchy in Time to a Hierarchy in Space: The Meanings of Sino-Babylonianism in Early Twentieth-Century China

Tze-ki Hon[1]

Abstract

In 1892, Terrien de Lacouperie (1845–1894), professor of Chinese at University College in London, set out to prove that the Chinese migrated from Mesopotamia in prehistoric times. Despite mixed responses from his colleagues, Lacouperie's "Sino-Babylonianism" found its way into China and captured the imagination of Chinese historians from the 1900s to 1930s. Whether they supported or opposed Lacouperie's view, Chinese historians were intrigued by his boldness in linking early China to the global network of trade and cultural exchange. This article examines how Chinese historians adopted, transformed, and appropriated Sino-Babylonianism in their discourse on the nation. It argues that the rise and fall of Sino-Babylonianism coincided with the Chinese perceptions of the world system of nation-states. Sino-Babylonianism was warmly received when the Chinese perceived the world system of nation-states as a hierarchy in temporality, prescribing a process of evolution that all human communities must follow. Sino-Babylonianism was fiercely rejected when the Chinese saw the world system of nation-states as a hierarchy in space, characterized by incessant territorial expansion of

[1]State University of New York at Geneseo, Geneseo, NY, USA

Corresponding Author:
Tze-ki Hon, Department of History, SUNY-Geneseo, 1 College Circle, Geneseo, NY 14454, USA
Email: hon@geneseo.edu

imperialist powers. In both instances, Sino-Babylonianism was no longer what Lacouperie had proposed in the late nineteenth century. Rather, it was an important benchmark for the Chinese understanding of the modern global order.

Keywords

cultural nationalists, imperialism, Sino-Babylonianism, social evolution, Terrien de Lacouperie, territorial sovereignty, world system of nation-states

In 1892, Terrien de Lacouperie (1845–1894), the professor of Chinese at University College in London, published his best-known work, *Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilisation, from 2,300 b.c. to 200 a.d.* (hereafter, *Western Origin*). Cleverly combining the archaeological knowledge of the time and his gift for philology, Lacouperie argued that the Chinese were descendents of the Bak tribes who migrated to China from Mesopotamia in prehistoric times (Lacouperie, 1894: 1–8). Textual support of his argument came from the *Yijng* (Book of Changes), the first classic of the Confucian Five Classics (*wujing*). Based on a meticulous comparison of the *Yijing* hexagrams and the cuneiform writings of Mesopotamia, he concluded that the *Yijing* was a Babylonian dictionary, containing the hidden code of an advanced civilization outside of China (Lacouperie, 1892a: v–xix; 1894: 16–19). In a tone filled with scientific certainty and scholarly authority, Lacouperie wrote,

> In all the cases where verification is possible, we have found that innovations and changes in Western Asia have made their mark in China. The reverse circumstance did not happen, and the influence of one side on the other remained unreciprocated, because China in antiquity had very little to give to West Asia. [Lacouperie, 1894: x]

From today's perspective, Lacouperie's "Sino-Babylonianism" (or, in Chinese, *xilai shuo*) is unsustainable because of its factual errors and its assumption of the monogenesis of Old-World civilizations (Fang, 1954: 32–36; Luo, 1955: 1–3; Leibold, 2006: 199–206). For critics of Orientalism, it is a blatant example of Westerners exerting their power of knowledge to denigrate and marginalize non-Western peoples (Said, 1994: 1–52). Nevertheless, from the 1900s to 1930s, Sino-Babylonianism captured the imagination of many Chinese historians. Whether they supported or opposed Lacouperie's view, Chinese historians were intrigued by his boldness in linking early China to the global network of cultural exchange. They were

impressed by his ingenuity in turning Chinese ancient texts into historical documents of world civilizations. Above all, they were fascinated by his argument that early China was an advanced civilization with sophisticated metallurgy, efficient agricultural production, and an organized system of labor.

More interestingly, cultural nationalists were the first to accept Sino-Babylonianism. Among the ardent supporters were Deng Shi (1877–?), Huang Jie (1873–1935), Liu Shipei (1884–1919), and Zhang Taiyan (1869–1935), who tirelessly promoted Sino-Babylonianism in *Guocui xuebao* (*Journal of National Essence*, 1905–1911). As political thinkers, these cultural nationalists opposed the Manchu dynasty on the grounds of Han nationalism; as scholars, they supported a recovery of Chinese essence by reinterpreting ancient texts; as textbook authors, they promoted patriotism by narrating the past in light of national renewal (Zheng, 1997). Their fervent nationalism and nativism notwithstanding, they had no qualms about Lacouperie's disrespect for Chinese civilization. Instead, they saw Sino-Babylonianism as an effective weapon in their struggle against the Manchu government (Chow, 1997; Dikötter, 1992: 116–23; Fitzgerald, 1996: 67–88; Shen, 1997).

After the 1911 Revolution, Sino-Babylonianism continued to be popular, and at one time the story of Chinese migration from Mesopotamia was included in the new national anthem (Wang, 2005: 62). It was not until the 1920s and 1930s that Chinese historians took a different view of Lacouperie's work. With increasing archaeological evidence showing the autochthonous origin of the Chinese, Sino-Babylonianism became less creditable and convincing (Luo, 1955: 1–3; Leibold, 2006: 199–206). Yet, it remained a major subject of academic debate as the Chinese faced the challenge of building a unified nation. This time, Sino-Babylonianism was no longer seen as a source of national pride, but as a symbol of foreign intrusion. As a result, historians such as Gu Shi (1878–1956) and Miao Fenglin (1898–1959) attacked Sino-Babylonianism to mobilize their fellow countrymen to protect their country's territorial sovereignty (Dikötter, 1992: 131–36; 1997: 18–25; Miao, 1930). In their fierce attacks, Lacouperie was condemned as a spokesman of imperialism and the cultural nationalists of the 1900s became his accomplices in colonizing China (Fang, 1954: 32–36; Luo, 1955: 1–3).

What had led to this rise and fall of Sino-Babylonianism in China? Why did Chinese scholars change their minds so quickly and dramatically? Does this change suggest a drastic alteration in the Chinese view of the nation? Does it symbolize a fundamental shift in the Chinese perception of the world? To answer these questions, this article traces the process by which Sino-Babylonianism was introduced to China. It begins with a summary of Lacouperie's original argument and its representation in Japan. Then it explains

how Chinese scholars used the Japanese studies of Sino-Babylonianism to construct different trajectories of the Chinese nation.

My goal in this study is not to ascertain the validity of Sino-Babylonianism but to demonstrate the transformative nature of the transnational circulation of knowledge. Like other items of transnational circulation such as coffee, silk, silver, sugar, and tea (Minz, 1985; Pomeranz and Topik, 1999), Sino-Babylonianism took different forms, acquired different meanings, and served different purposes in various places. Even when it first arrived in China in the early 1900s, it was already substantially different from its original form in Europe. As it became increasingly entrenched in the Chinese discourse of the nation, it mutated into something that bore little resemblance to Lacouperie's original idea. This "translingual practice," as Lydia Liu points out, is a creative process by which "new words, meanings, discourses, and modes of representation arise, circulate, and acquire legitimacy within the host language due to, not in spite of, the latter's contact/collision with the guest language" (Liu, 1995: 26). My goal in this study is to show how new meanings were created when Sino-Babylonianism became part of the Chinese discourse of the nation.

As we shall see, the Chinese were attracted to Sino-Babylonianism because of their belief in the monogenesis of world civilizations. Assuming that all human communities originated in Mesopotamia, the Chinese saw Sino-Babylonianism as a justification for looking back to the distant past to find commonality among ancient civilizations. It also motivated them to look forward to the future when China would catch up with Europe and the United States in building a modern nation-state. Both in prospect and retrospect, Sino-Babylonianism prompted the Chinese to examine their role in the world, particularly their position in the twentieth-century world order. As Rebecca Karl has demonstrated, from the beginning Chinese nationalism was conceptualized in relation to a global imaginary and concrete geopolitical context (Karl, 2002: 3–52). For this reason, the rise and fall of Sino-Babylonianism coincided with the changes in the Chinese perception of the world system of nation-states. Sino-Babylonianism was warmly received when the Chinese perceived the world system of nation-states as a hierarchy in temporality, prescribing a process of evolution that all human communities must follow. Sino-Babylonianism was fiercely rejected when the Chinese saw the world system of nation-states as a hierarchy in space, characterized by incessant territorial expansion of imperialist powers.[1] Seen in this light, the rise and fall of Sino-Babylonianism is not a saga of false claims or unfettered imagination; nor is it a story about the triumph of empirical research in disproving wrong assumptions. Rather, it is an important benchmark for the Chinese understanding of the modern global order.

The Science of History

The idea of the Western origin of Chinese civilization was not new. As David E. Mungello points out, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Jesuits had attempted to interpret Confucianism as a Chinese version of Christianity (Mungello, 2005: 15–24). At the heart of the "Jesuit accommodation" was the belief that the Chinese texts, if read allegorically, would reveal China's deep connections with Christian Europe. An exemplar of Jesuit accommodation was Joarchim Bouvet (1656–1730), a French missionary who for a brief time won the trust of the Qing emperor Kangxi (Han, 1998). In his writings, Bouvet argued that the Chinese characters were hieroglyphs requiring figurative reading to decode their hidden meanings. He based his argument on a close study of the *Yijing*, where he found Fu Xi, the legendary hero in prehistoric China, to be a representation of the universal lawgiver known to different ancient peoples by a variety of names. To further his claim, he showed that the *Yijing* trigrams and hexagrams were mathematical symbols proving the existence of the Christian God (Mungello, 1985: 77–105; Smith, 2001). This attempt to link China to Christian Europe continued throughout the nineteenth century. In 1871, two decades prior to the publication of *Western Origin*, Joseph Edkins (1823–1905) published *China's Place in Philology*, where he demonstrated the similarity between the Chinese language and European languages (Edkins, 1871: 1–19, 397–403).

To a great extent, in promoting Sino-Babylonianism, Lacouperie followed the footsteps of the Jesuits in linking China to Europe. He assumed, as had the Jesuits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that China must have been shaped by foreign culture. Like them, he was interested in uncovering a hidden code by reading Chinese texts allegorically. Remarkably like Bouvet, he focused on the *Yijing* because of its graphic symbols and mathematical signs—the allegedly universal languages that all human communities shared. Yet he differed from the Jesuits in one area. Instead of relying on Christian doctrine to connect China with Europe, he sought authority in empirical sciences to construct what he considered a fact-based account of early China. In the introduction to *Western Origin*, he wrote,

> That civilisation has long appeared unaccountable, and its similarities and dissemblances as compared with our own have caused it to be taken as evidence of most conflicting theories otherwise unsupported. But *the science of history* has now shown, in all known instances, that centres of civilisation never arose elsewhere than amid a conflict of races, when sparks, coming from a more enlightened quarter, have

brought in an initiating and leading spirit, under the form of one or several men, or of immigrating tribes, incited by trade, religion, or in search of safety. [Lacouperie, 1894: ix; emphasis added]

For Lacouperie, the Western origin of Chinese civilization was a conclusion he drew from practicing the "science of history." By the science of history, he meant not merely a careful collection of documents and an intensive study of historical texts. He meant also recently developed empirical methods that gave the past an aura of authenticity: the archaeological study of historical sites such as tombs and monuments, the collection and cataloguing of material artifacts such as coins and ornaments, and the philological and linguistic comparison of disparate texts found in different lands. These empirical methods became prominent in Victorian England as a result of the rise of Assyriology. Championed by scholars like Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810–1895), and implemented through such eminent institutions as the British Museum and the Council of the Royal Asiatic Studies, the empirical studies of material artifacts from Mesopotamia represented a breakthrough in human understanding of the past (Sayce, 1894; Budge, 1925: 31–38). In the words of A. C. Sayce (1845–1933), an ardent admirer of Assyriology, the empirical study of the past symbolized "one of the scientific triumphs of the present century" (Sayce, 1894: 22).

In his copious writings on China, Lacouperie proved that he had mastered the science of history. He compared Babylonian hieroglyphs with Chinese characters; he examined Chinese coins; he studied the writing systems of Central and East Asia (Lacouperie, 1887, 1888, 1892b, [1894] 1965). With this vast pool of empirical data, Lacouperie felt he understood the history of early China better than Chinese scholars did. For him, Chinese scholars might possess more written documents, but they were unable to fully understand their own past because they were "lacking originality and creative power, [and] deeply imbued with reverence for the ancients" (Lacouperie, 1894: x). What the science of history provided, according to Lacouperie, was an insight into human history that had never been available before. Covering a long span of time and connecting lands far apart, the science of history showed that "there is no such thing as the history of one country" (Lacouperie, 1894: ix). From the beginning, human history was a story about migration, diffusion, and cultural encounters in which the strong conquered the weak, the powerful ruled the powerless, and advanced societies dominated backward ones. And it was this story of cultural diffusion—a process of transferring cultural elements from the more civilized core to the less civilized periphery—that was the main subject of *Western Origin*.

In *Western Origin*, Lacouperie's story of cultural diffusion consisted of three parts. First, based on a careful comparison of the cuneiform inscriptions in Mesopotamia and Chinese texts such as *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Scribe), he traced the migration of the Bak tribes (or *baixing*) from West Asia to China around 2300 BCE. Having arrived in China, the Bak tribes established settled communities with walled cities under the leadership of Nakunte, who was known in Chinese texts as Huang Di (Yellow Emperor). For a long time, the Bak tribes preserved their own identity until Emperors Yao and Shun, both of whom were offspring of interracial marriages (Lacouperie, 1894: 1–14). The second part of the story was about the constant flow of cultural artifacts from West Asia to China after the arrival of the Bak tribes. The list of imported cultural items was long, including the syllabaries of Chaldea, the Babylonian system of government, Assyro-Babylonian mythology, and Egyptian metallurgy (Lacouperie, 1894: 15–42). The most important piece of evidence was the *Yijing*. "The original lists [of the *Yijing* hexagrams] are so much like the so-called syllabaries of Chaldea," Lacouperie wrote, "that it is impossible not to believe that their authors were acquainted either themselves or by tradition with these syllabaries" (Lacouperie, 1894: 16). The third part of the story was the Bak tribes' longing for their homeland after they had settled in China. Based on a study of a host of Chinese texts, including *Mu tianzi zhuan*, *Shanhai jing*, *Zhuangzi*, *Zhushu jinian*, and *Huainan zi*, Lacouperie described a long journey of Emperor Mu of Zhou who, in the tenth century BCE, traveled to a faraway land known as Xi Wang Mu (Lacouperie, 1894: 264–79). Unlike some scholars who took Xi Wang Mu to mean the deity "Royal Mother of the West,"[2] Lacouperie believed that Xi Wang Mu was the name of a kingdom in today's Xinjiang, between Karashar and Kutcha (Lacouperie, 1894: 264–68). For him, the significance of Emperor Mu's journey lay not in the distance he traveled but in his remembrance of the Western origin of his race. "[Xi] Wang Mu," Lacouperie reiterated, "means the *Wang-mu* of the west, and this *Wang-mu* is undoubtedly an attempt at imitating with an appropriate meaning of the foreign name or title of the sovereign referred to" (Lacouperie, 1894: 278).

Despite his erudition and coherent argument, Lacouperie met fierce resistance in Europe. Although well received in the circle of Assyriologists, who generally saw Lacouperie's Sino-Babylonianism as an extension of their special field, many sinologists were skeptical of Lacouperie's view. Writing for the London-based journal *The Academy* in the mid-1880s, the accomplished translator James Legge (1815–1897) publicly questioned Lacouperie's argument. In response, two of Lacouperie's supporters, Robert Douglas and Charles de Harlez, spoke out in defense of Sino-Babylonianism. And yet

Legge steadfastly stood his ground, contending that Lacouperie was wrong in his reading of the *Yijing*.[3] In the 1890s, Lacouperie faced an even more formidable challenge when a new generation of sinologists questioned the validity of Sino-Babylonianism. The most vigorous attack came from the Leiden sinologist Gustave Schlegel (1840–1903) who, in 1891, published an article critiquing Sino-Babylonianism in the new journal *T'oung Pao*. After showing Lacouperie's errors in facts and methodology, Schlegel concluded, "We cannot follow Prof. de Lacouperie in his method of dissecting the ancient Chinese characters. . . . It is so contrary to the genius of the Chinese graphic system, that no genuine Sinologue can admit his conclusions" (Schlegel, 1891: 245; see also Cordier, 1893). In the end, facing mounting criticism and unfavorable responses, Lacouperie found that the publication of *Western Origin* brought him frustration and humiliation rather than glory and honor. In 1894, two years after the publication of the book, he died at the relatively young age of 49.

Sino-Babylonianism in East Asia

In the "translingual practice," what happened in Europe did not dictate events in East Asia. Despite the mixed responses in Europe, Sino-Babylonianism received a warm welcome in both Japan and China. In 1900, eight years after the publication of *Western Origin*, detailed summaries of Lacouperie's writings appeared in *Shina bunmei shi* (History of Chinese Civilization) coauthored by two nonacademic historians, Shirakawa Jirō and Kokubu Tanenori.[4] Like Lacouperie, the two Japanese authors saw Sino-Babylonianism as an application of recent empirical methods. Although they did not use the term the *science of history*, they shared Lacouperie's optimism that historians would gain a better understanding of the past if they broadened their scope of study to include material artifacts unearthed by archaeologists and anthropologists (Shirakawa and Kokubu, 1900: preface 1). For the two Japanese authors, Lacouperie made an important contribution to the study of China by compiling a long list of her debts to West Asia. To prove their point, they summarized Lacouperie's studies of the migration of the Bak tribes and the Chinese adoption of West Asian cultural artifacts (pp. 26–44). They also devoted a huge section to the *Yijing*, showing how the trigrams and hexagrams were similar to the hieroglyphs of Mesopotamia (pp. 45–68).

As in other cultural encounters, the two Japanese authors did not merely summarize Lacouperie's writings; they reinterpreted, redeployed, and re-created them to address issues in their own country.[5] First, despite their deep knowledge of Western scholarship, they did not mention the sinologists'

criticisms of Sino-Babylonianism; instead, they presented it as if it were the most advanced study of human civilization from Europe.[6] This omission, intentional or not, had long-term consequence because Chinese readers relied on the Japanese summary to understand Lacouperie's views. Without knowing of the criticisms of Sino-Babylonianism, Chinese readers thought that Lacouperie's view must have been universally accepted in Europe. Second, in their summary, the two Japanese authors highlighted one important aspect of Lacouperie's studies. Appearing after a chapter on Chinese mythology, their summary of Sino-Babylonianism demonstrated that the mythological figures in prehistoric China were actually real historical leaders who brought advanced cultural artifacts from Mesopotamia. Of course, this was a point that Lacouperie stressed throughout his writings, especially in his account of the migration of the Bak tribes. But in their summary, the Japanese authors turned his Sino-Babylonianism into a full-fledged historical validation of Chinese mythology.

The intention of the two Japanese authors was particularly clear in their discussion of early Chinese mythical figures. As reported in Sima Qian's *Shiji*, there were five mythical rulers (*wudi*) in China before the Xia dynasty.[7] But in Sima Qian's account, it is unclear who those five mythical rulers were and how they were related to one another.[8] Based on Lacouperie's findings, the two Japanese authors attempted to clarify the political genealogy of early China. They identified the Mesopotamian equivalents of the Chinese mythological leaders, such as equating Dungi with Cang Jie (the creator of writing), Sargon with Shen Nong (the creator of agriculture), and Nakunte with Huang Di (the first ruler of China). Based on these parallels, they were able to assign specific dates to the Chinese mythological figures, thereby tracing the gradual progression of China from a tribal society to a sedentary agrarian community (Shirakawa and Kokubu, 1900: 32–34).

The results of this historicization of Chinese mythology were significant. First, the two Japanese authors broadened the appeal of Sino-Babylonianism. In addition to being a proof of China's link to Mesopotamia, Sino-Babylonianism could now be taken as a validation of early Chinese history. Whether or not there was a migration of the Bak tribes, Sino-Babylonianism could be understood more broadly as a historical perspective on cross-cultural encounters, showing the invisible and yet vital links between various parts of the globe. Second, in their historicization of Chinese mythology, the two Japanese authors showed that there was much to be learned from prehistoric China about human civilization and material progress. Although expressed in stories full of strange plots and wondrous figures, Chinese mythology described events that were as real as those recorded in conventional historical

texts. Consequently, the brief and elliptical accounts of prehistoric China scattering in noncanonic texts such as *Mu tianzi zhuan*, *Shanhai jing*, and *Zhushu jinian* were now valuable sources on human evolution.

In the early 1900s, it was this historicization of mythology, rather than the original text of Lacouperie's *Western Origin*, that attracted Chinese scholars' attention. For instance, Jiang Zhiyou (1866–1929), the Chinese scholar who introduced Sino-Babylonianism to China, embraced Shirakawa and Kokubu's view because of its cross-cultural appeal. A frequent contributor to *Xinmin congbao* (New People's Miscellany), Jiang Zhiyou summarized Lacouperie's Sino-Babylonianism in his "Zhongguo renzhong kao" (A study of the origins of the Chinese race), serialized in the journal from 1903 to 1905.[9] Jiang's summary, which was based on Shirakawa and Kokubu, focused on the cultural links between China and Mesopotamia. Like Shirakawa and Kokubu, Jiang mentioned in passing the epic of migration and concentrated on the linguistic, institutional, and cultural similarities between China and Mesopotamia (Jiang, 1929: 26–29). As with the two Japanese scholars, he stressed the importance of the *Yijing* in demonstrating the cultural diffusion from Babylon to China (pp. 29–32). To promote Sino-Babylonianism as a history of cultural encounter, Jiang ended his summary with a discussion of the continuing migration of people from West Asia to China, such as the arrival of the Arabs and Jews in the late imperial period. In the final segment, he concluded that as a hypothesis for understanding early China, Sino-Babylonianism elucidated the cultural links and the human networks that stretched between East and West Asia (p. 38).[10]

Another early supporter of Sino-Babylonianism was the eminent historical geographer Ding Qian (1843–1919). Much more than Jiang Zhiyou, Ding Qian appreciated Sino-Babylonianism for its value in elucidating the history of early China. Applying Sino-Babylonianism to studying *Mu tianzi zhuan*—an obscure text found in a tomb in the third century CE—Ding rendered the text as a historical account of King Mu of Zhou taking a serpentine journey to Mesopotamia in the tenth century BCE. Annotating the text with detailed information from a host of other texts, Ding traced King Mu's journey inside and outside China. He emphasized King Mu's visit to the faraway kingdom Xi Wang Mu, where he met with the queen of the land also known as Xi Wang Mu. Unlike Lacouperie, who thought that the kingdom of Xi Wang Mu was located in Xinjiang, Ding believed that it was in Assyria—the alleged homeland of the Chinese before they migrated to East Asia (Ding, [1915] 1962: 1303). As for the queen of Xi Wang Mu, he thought she was a symbol of the Moon Goddess of the Chaldean empire (pp. 1346–47).

As with Shirakawa and Kokubu, Ding saw the significance of King Mu's journey not in the distance he traveled, but in his apparent "nostalgic remembrance of [his] homeland" (*si gutu zhi si*). His journey, according to Ding, was an attempt to forge a sentimental link to his native land after settling in China (Ding, [1915] 1962: 1303, 1343–48). Ding found that many times in history, the Chinese had traveled frequently to Mesopotamia to pay homage to their native land. This "nostalgic remembrance" attested to the fact that the people of China originally migrated from Mesopotamia, and *Mu tianzi zhuan* demonstrated how closely the Chinese were sentimentally linked to West Asia (pp. 1349–51).

Making Sense of the Distant Past

Their fervent interest in promoting Sino-Babylonianism notwithstanding, Jiang Zhiyou and Ding Qian succeeded only in introducing Lacouperie's view to China as a novel historical perspective. It was another group of scholars, the cultural nationalists, who transformed Sino-Babylonianism into a stunning historical vision that gave meaning to the entire history of early China. Although this group of scholars relied on Jiang Zhiyou and Ding Qian for information about Sino-Babylonianism, they were instrumental in making Sino-Babylonianism part of the fabric of early twentieth-century Chinese historical consciousness.

In the 1900s, as the Qing government was implementing the "new policies" (*xin zheng*), the journal *Guocui xuebao* played the role of a disguised mouthpiece of the revolutionaries (Hon, 2003: 246–55). Unlike *Minbao* (People's Journal), the Tokyo-based propaganda arm of the revolutionaries, *Guocui xuebao* did not publish articles overtly advocating an anti-Manchu revolution. Rather, it carried articles discussing history, poetry, biography, literature, and fine arts. Its relatively subdued position was in part a result of its location. Publishing in the Anglo-American concessions in Shanghai, the editors of the journal were constantly under the surveillance of Qing officials, who were just a stone's throw away in the Chinese section of the city. The low-key posture of the journal was also due in part to its mission: spreading revolutionary ideas to the educated elites who had close ties to the Manchu government (Hon, 2004). To fight the "culture war," the writers of *Guocui xuebao* had to communicate their thoughts in a way acceptable to the educated elites, meaning that in their writings they had to employ classical imagery, historical examples, poetic metaphors, and above all, a genteel style of writing (Hon, 2007: 95–100).

This demand to write for the elites made Sino-Babylonianism a perfect weapon for promoting revolution. It was, first and foremost, an imported idea. As understood at the time, Sino-Babylonianism was the most advanced learning from Europe based on empirical, scientific studies. It was supposedly the key to unlocking the mystery of human civilizations, particularly the Chinese civilization. In addition, Sino-Babylonianism explicitly linked China to Mesopotamia—the home of human civilization and the birthplace of agriculture. The link, however tenuous, gave the Chinese educated elites much needed pride after watching their country repeatedly defeated by Europeans in the last decades of the nineteenth century (Ishikawa, 2003: 19–23). The link also brought them hope that the present plight of the country would be temporary. If indeed many centuries ago the Chinese had developed an advanced civilization, then it seemed probable that they could build another one in modern times. More important, Sino-Babylonianism helped to sharpen the racial distinction between the Han and the Manchu. If there was a massive migration from Mesopotamia to China in prehistoric times led by Huang Di, then China should be ruled by Huang Di's descendants, who populated various parts of the country since the beginning of history. Commonly known as the Han race, the descendents of Huang Di must be dissatisfied with the current government, which was an oppressive regime of a foreign race. Seen in this light, Sino-Babylonianism became a call to arms for all descendents of Huang Di to wage a racial war against the Manchus. Given the fact that the descendents of Huang Di were culturally superior, they should be able to topple the Manchu dynasty if they found a way to work together.

Among the writers for *Guocui xuebao*, Huang Jie was the first to use Sino-Babylonianism to promote a racial war. In 1905, in his *Huang shi* (History of the Yellow) he cited Lacouperie as the source for the migration of the Bak tribes to China. The migration, Huang contended, not only linked China to West Asia, but also made the Chinese (i.e., the Han race) one of the highly civilized races on earth (Huang, 1905: 50–51).[11] With advanced skills in metallurgy and a sophisticated social system, the migrants quickly conquered the local tribes and controlled a large territory (pp. 53–55). This grand founding of the Chinese nation in prehistoric times, Huang suggested, was reported in texts such as *Shanhai jing*, *Huang Di neijing*, *Er ya*, *Liji*, *Shangshu*, *Zhushu jinian*, and *Mu tianzi zhuan*. These texts, despite their different statuses in the Confucian canon, detailed the Chinese efforts in building an advanced civilization. For Huang, the journey of King Mu of Zhou was particularly revealing. As shown in *Mu tianzi zhuan*, at the time of King Mu the Chinese controlled a vast territory stretching from East to Central Asia. It was this powerful and highly civilized China, Huang opined, that the twentieth-century Chinese must strive to recover (p. 55).

Less politically overt and yet equally poignant was Zhang Taiyan's appropriation of Sino-Babylonianism. In *Qiushu* (Book Written in Oppression, 1904), Zhang did not explicitly tie Sino-Babylonianism to a racial revolution against the Manchus. For the purpose of winning the support of educated elites, he was eager to present an image of academic impartiality when discussing Sino-Babylonianism. Drawing from Jiang Zhiyou's summary and Japanese writings, Zhang focused on Lacouperie's comparison of cuneiform writings and the *Yijing* hexagrams, showing the empirical evidence of a massive migration from Mesopotamia to China (Zhang, 1984: 170–71). To further prove his point, Zhang located the Chinese terms for Chaldea, *ge tian*, in the historical texts *Lüshi chunqiu* and *Taiping yuelan* (p. 173). Based on Shirakawa and Kokubu's summary, Zhang equated Dungi with Cang Jie, Sargon with Shen Nong, and Nakunte with Huang Di (pp. 173–74). But unlike the two Japanese writers as well as Jiang Zhiyou and Ding Qian, Zhang used the information to construct a coherent picture of Chinese evolution, detailing the stages of development from the arrival of the West Asians to the beginning of the Zhou dynasty.

Zhang's story of Chinese evolution consisted of four stages. First, after arriving from Mesopotamia, the West Asians led by Huang Di defeated the local peoples under Chi You at Ban Quan. The battle determined that the West Asians would be the de facto rulers of China (Zhang, 1984: 175). Second, as the West Asians moved from the Yellow River valley to the Yangzi River valley, they lost contact with their native land, and yet they preserved their identity by practicing matriarchy, a social system they brought from Mesopotamia (pp. 170–71). Third, after the founding of the Xia dynasty, the West Asians shunned their cultural roots and adopted the local practice of patriarchy; thereafter they built a composite political system that included peoples from different tribes and races (p. 172). Fourth, from the Xia to the Zhou dynasties, the West Asians basically considered China their homeland, and had no intention of returning to Mesopotamia; the journey of King Mu of Zhou was therefore an exception to the norm (pp. 175–77).

From the above, it is clear that the main components of Zhang Taiyan's picture of early China were drawn from Sima Qian's *Shiji*. In the "Wudi benji" (Basic Annals of the Five Emperors), Sima Qian tells us about the epic battle between Huang Di and Chi You, the patrilineal genealogy of early rulers from Huang Di to Emperors Yao and Shun, and Huang Di's attempt to build a composite political system to include different tribes. But Sima Qian's story of early China gained a new meaning when Zhang reinterpreted it in light of Sino-Babylonianism. For Zhang, the migration of West Asians into China in prehistoric times helped to clarify the significance of the battle between Huang Di and Chi You. In Sima Qian's account, the battle took place

simply because Chi You "disobeyed the orders of the [Yellow] Emperor" (*bu yong di ming*); in response, Huang Di gathered the armies of his tribes to defeat Chi You (Sima, 1959: 3). In his narrative, Sima Qian neither explained the reason for Chi You's rebellion, nor discussed Huang Di's goal in launching the war. In Zhang's version, however, the battle assumed monumental significance. It was not merely a struggle between two tribes, but a showdown between two peoples at different levels of civilization. On one side was Huang Di's group, migrants from Mesopotamia and masters of the most advanced agricultural technology of the world. On the other side was Chi You's group, indigenous people and practitioners of hunting and gathering. Chi You's group was doomed because it could not match the migrants in technology and political organization (Shen, 1997: 25–50).

For Zhang Taiyan, brutal as it might seem, the battle between Huang Di and Chi You marked a crucial turning point in the evolution of Chinese civilization. Before the battle, China was primitive in its political structure, social system, and economy. After the battle, China was transformed into one of the world's advanced civilizations. As if to reassure readers that Sino-Babylonianism would help them understand early China but not undermine their national pride, Zhang reiterated that the cultural diffusion from Mesopotamia only happened once. After the massive migration in prehistoric times, there was no more migration from West Asia, and the migrants gradually planted roots in China. To drive home his point, he parted company with Lacouperie in interpreting the journey of King Mu of Zhou. Unlike Lacouperie, he did not consider the journey as an episode in the longstanding cultural contacts between Mesopotamia and China; rather he saw it as an anomaly that proved the complete integration of West Asians in China.

In addition to giving new meaning to Huang Di's victory over Chi You, Zhang Taiyan also used Sino-Babylonianism to explain social change in early China. In Sima Qian's account, political power in early China was transmitted from generation to generation through the patrilineal line, beginning with Huang Di to Emperors Yao and Shun. But there was ambiguity in Sima Qian's language when addressing the rulers' family names. For instance, he referred to Huang Di by his *xing* (maternal family name), Gongsun. When discussing other rulers, he referred them by their *shi* (paternal family name), such as Shen Nong shi (Sima, 1959: 1–3). For Zhang Taiyan, this ambiguity in Sima Qian's language attested to the fact that there was indeed a massive migration from Mesopotamia in prehistoric times. The West Asians practiced matriarchy and they brought their family system to China. Thus, Huang Di's family name was matrilineal, signified by the term *xing*. As the West Asians

gradually planted roots in China, they adopted the local practice of patriarchy. By the time of the Xia dynasty, the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy was complete, indicated by the widespread use of *shi* to refer to patrilineal lineage (Zhang, 1984: 171).

For educated elites of early 1900s China, Zhang's reading of Sima Qian's account supported the notion of social evolution. Made popular by Yan Fu (1853–1921) in his 1904 translation of Edward Jenks's *A History of Politics*, the social evolution of human communities was thought to have gone through three stages: hunting and gathering, feudalism, and nation-state (Yan, [1904] 1981: ix–x). In Zhang Taiyan's account, the law of social evolution was evident in the history of early China. The complex system of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou, Zhang contended, was the result of synthesizing indigenous and foreign elements, and combining the agricultural technology of West Asia with the patrilineal family system of East Asia. The synthesis transformed China from a land of hunters and gatherers to a feudalistic state supervising a complex agrarian economy. In Zhang's hands, Sino-Babylonianism became a useful means of explaining social evolution.

Recovering the Chinese Essence

Seemingly benign and pedantic, Zhang Taiyan's interpretation of the history of early China underscored the need to recover the glory of early China. Suggested in Zhang's account was a China with a large territory, a cohesive political system, a powerful army, and a vibrant economy. For readers of the early 1900s, this account begged the question of why China had descended so low in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, falling behind other countries in building a nation-state. If indeed Edward Jenks was right in describing the law of social evolution as the transition from hunting and gathering through feudalism to the nation-state, what lessons could one draw from the history of early China to facilitate the country's transition to a nation-state?

Whereas Zhang Taiyan raised the question without answering it, Liu Shipei offered concrete suggestions in his accounts of early China. Liu's accounts appeared in a number of his writings published from 1903 to 1906, including *Zhongguo minzu zhi* (History of the Chinese Nation), *Rang shu* (On Expelling [the Alien Rulers]), *Guzheng yuanlun* (The Origins of Ancient Government), *Guzheng yuanshi lun* (The Origins and Development of Ancient Government), and *Zhongguo lishi jiaoke shu* (Textbook of Chinese History). Covering a long span of time and a variety of issues, Liu's accounts of early China were the most comprehensive among the three *Guocui xuebao* writers. Unlike Huang Jie, who focused primarily on imperial history after

221 BCE, Liu wrote at length about early China, which, he believed, was the "golden age" of Chinese history. Contrary to Zhang Taiyan, who preferred writing short essays, Liu was adept in composing long historical narratives that gave readers a cohesive picture of the past. Above all, Liu differed from the other two by using Sino-Babylonianism to ponder the political future of China. For him, Sino-Babylonianism was not only a historical perspective, but also a political vision for twentieth-century China.

In Liu's writings, the main story of early China was remarkably similar to that of Zhang Taiyan. It began with the migration of the Bak tribes from Mesopotamia, who settled in China after winning the decisive battle over Chi You. The migrants, now known as the Han race, used their advanced technology to develop the Chinese economy, transforming it from hunting and gathering to agriculture. In turn, the economic restructuring paved the way for the rise of feudalism, which became the political structure of China for the ensuing 2,000 years (Liu, 1997: 602–3, 2178). However, unlike Zhang Taiyan, Liu focused on the distribution of political power. For instance, in *Rang shu* and *Guzheng yuanlun*, Liu explained the political implications in distinguishing *baixing* from *limin* (pp. 631–33, 650). Following Lacouperie, he equated the Bak tribes with *baixing*. He suggested that after Huang Di's defeat of Chi You, the distinction between *baixing* and *limin* was created to give power to the victorious Han race to govern the defeated *Miaozu* (Miao tribe). Henceforth, for a long time, there were two distinct classes in China: the ruling class of hereditary aristocrats (*baixing*) and the ruled class of the defeated (*limin* or *shumin*). But unlike Lacouperie, he argued that this distinction, although originally designed for distributing political power, later became the bedrock of Han Chinese nationalism. The Han race (or *baixing*), Liu contended, were so proud of being the ruling class that they could never accept or tolerate being ruled by a foreign race.

In *Zhongguo lishi jiaoke shu*, Liu Shipei further elaborated on the distinction between *baixing* and *limin*. For him, the migration of the Han race from Mesopotamia provided an answer to the question of why the political philosophy in the Western Zhou period contained so many contemporary European ideas. Despite the geographical distance and cultural differences, Liu claimed, the Han race and the Europeans shared similar political ideas because both of them originated in Mesopotamia in antiquity (Liu, 1997: 2272). A case in point was the notion of the balance of power. Applying philology to discussing philosophy, he explained the meanings of the characters *jun* 君 (king) and *qun* 群 (people) in the minds of the Western Zhou people (p. 2189). For him, the character *jun* 君 stands for the legislative and administrative powers of a king, as indicated in its two components—a

magistrate (*yin* 尹) and a mouth (*kou* 口). But even though a king possesses legislative and administrative power, he will not be a full-fledged ruler until he receives popular support. Hence, for Liu, the ultimate political authority lies not in the king but in the people, as symbolized in the character *qun* 群—a flock of sheep (*yang* 羊) following their leader (*jun* 君). This balance of power between the rulers and the ruled applied to rituals as well. According to Liu, an example can be found in the two Chinese characters for rituals, *fengsu* 風俗. Whereas *feng* refers to teaching (*jiao* 教) initiated by the government, *su* suggests local customs (signified by the particle *ren* 人). Thus, for Liu, rituals are never fixed; instead, they are flexible, malleable, and adaptable depending on the interaction between the government and the people (p. 2201).

In discussing the Western Zhou political system, Liu paid special attention to the limits of government power. He admitted that as time passed, the Zhou kings gathered more power, extending their control over matters relating to religion, land distribution, and property transmission. But he stressed that the basic structure of the Zhou system remained intact. It was still a system of checks and balances wherein the legislative, executive, and judiciary powers were in the hands of different groups of players in the political arena. To underscore his point, he wrote at length about the rights (*quanli*) of the Zhou people, such as the rights of free speech, protest, and joining the government. At the same time, he reminded readers that the Zhou people paid equal attention to performing civic duties, such as paying taxes and serving in the army (Liu, 1997: 2227–30). All in all, in Liu's mind, the Western Zhou political system resembled a contemporary European government, characterized by "its combination of governing and learning" (*zhengjiao heyi*) and "its use of rituals in shaping social behavior" (*yi li fang min*) (p. 2271).

Apparently, in *Zhongguo lishi jiaoke shu*, Liu Shipei focused not on what really happened during the Western Zhou, but how Western Zhou philosophy would shed light on the political structure of modern China. As a history textbook, *Zhongguo lishi jiaoke shu* said little about the history of ancient China, but it inspired its readers to think about what an ideal Chinese government would look like in the twentieth century. While the accuracy of Liu's analysis of the Western Zhou political system might be doubtful, his readers could hardly miss his points concerning the balance of power between the rulers and the ruled, the state and society, and the center and the periphery. Clearly, among the three writers for *Guocui xuebao*, Liu Shipei was the most political in using Sino-Babylonianism. In his hands, Sino-Babylonianism became the justification for building a republican system in which the rulers and the ruled shared power.

The Hierarchy in Time

In the writings of the three *Guocui xuebao* writers, we see both their desire to participate in the global discussion of human origins and their proclivity for using that discussion to address their domestic concerns. This double move—the quest to join the world and the determination to assert Chinese uniqueness—reveals an underlying tension in forming a nation-state. As Prasenjit Duara points out, all nation-states have to confront an aporia of past and present (Duara, 1995: 27–33). On the one hand, a nation-state has to emphasize its "unprecedented nature" to prove that it is worthy of membership in the global interstate system; on the other hand, a nation-state has to highlight its intrinsic difference by glorifying "the ancient or eternal character of the nation" (p. 29). This aporia of time was further complicated by the fact that China joined the world system of nation-states at the height of imperialism and colonialism (Karl, 2002: 3–26). When Sino-Babylonianism was first introduced into China in the early 1900s, post-Enlightenment Europe and post–Civil War America were taken to be the standards of modernity in the "hierarchy in temporality." "Difference in the global system," Arif Dirlik writes, "was hierarchized in a temporality in which Euro-American economic, political, social, and cultural norms represented the teleological end of history" (Dirlik, 2007: 39–45).

   Hence, the initial warm reception of Sino-Babylonianism in China can be understood as the Chinese acceptance of the global hierarchy in temporality, and their willingness to subsume their "local time" to "world time."[12] Whether glorifying the distant past or philosophizing on Zhou feudalism, the three *Guocui xuebao* writers assumed that they could bolster Han nationalism by linking early China to West Asia—the homeland of human civilization. For them, the cultural diffusion from West Asia to China would convince the Han Chinese that they were a superior race, one capable of building a strong nation-state in modern times. To achieve this goal, the three writers adopted different strategies. For Huang Jie, Sino-Babylonianism explained the origin of the Han race and the benefits of having a superior culture in ancient times; but the pride of the Han race rested on their continuous effort to improve their political system. Seen in this light, Sino-Babylonianism served as an inducement for the Han race to build a strong nation-state in the modern era. For Zhang Taiyan, Sino-Babylonianism helped to clarify the process of social evolution in early China, especially the development of patriarchy and the imperial system. Understood this way, Sino-Babylonianism affirmed the law of evolution, which governed all countries in this world, and shed light on what the Chinese could accomplish in modern times. For

Liu Shipei, Sino-Babylonianism underscored the commonality between China and Europe, thereby allowing him to speculate on how some European political ideas could be applied to twentieth-century China. Perceived as such, Sino-Babylonianism was a justification for China adopting a modern European political system, particularly a parliamentary system and a republican government.

Prior to the 1911 Revolution, Sino-Babylonianism seemed to be effective in mobilizing the Chinese educated elites. According to Wei Tingsheng, in 1910 many candidates for the Boxer Indemnity Fellowships fervently discussed Sino-Babylonianism outside the examination hall (Wei, 1970: 1). The fellowship candidates, many of whom were prepared to go to Europe and America for graduate training, took Sino-Babylonianism for granted. For them, the monogenesis of world civilizations lent support to the Darwinist law of social evolution from hunting and gathering through feudalism to the nation-state. To be sure, this linear progression of human communities privileged post-Enlightenment Europe and post–Civil War America, and leaders of European countries and the United States were not shy about displaying their achievements through organizing world fairs, exhibitions, and prominent cultural and commercial ventures (Greenhalgh, 1998; Rydell, 1984). Yet, despite the apparent cultural, geographic, and racial bias, many Chinese found the linear progression both revealing and reassuring. It was revealing because it pointed to a distant past of which the Chinese could be proud. It was reassuring because it promised that if the Chinese worked hard enough, one day they would catch up with Europe and the United States.[13]

Agents of Imperialism

However, the Chinese discourse of the nation quickly changed after World War I. First shown in the Allied Powers' decision to transfer German colonies to Japan in 1919, and then demonstrated in the Japanese encroachment in northeast China during the 1930s, the post–World War I world seemed to be dominated by new imperialist powers ready to employ legal and illegal means to expand their territory (Xu, 2005: 1–18). For the Chinese, this global hierarchy in space meant that the power of each nation-state was no longer measured by how closely it resembled the political, social, and economic systems of Euro-America. Instead, it was measured by the size of a country's territory, the effectiveness of its government in protecting its territorial boundaries, and the extent to which the transnational peoples within the borders were effectively domesticated. During the 1920s and 1930s, this shift from temporality to "geobody" in global hierarchy fueled an anti-imperialist

nationalism in China, giving rise to the fervent calls to protect Chinese territorial sovereignty (Duara, 1997; 2003: 1–40).

A prime example of this anti-imperialist nationalism is *Yugong banyuekan* (Bimonthly of Historical Geography). Published from 1934 to 1937, the journal directly responded to the threat of Japanese invasion, especially the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. In the "Purpose of Publication" (*fakanci*), the two editors of the journal, Gu Jiegang (1893–1980) and Tang Qixiang (1911–1992), reiterated the political implications of studying the territorial boundaries of imperial and modern China. They cautioned their readers not to follow the Japanese practice of distinguishing "China proper" (*benbu*) from its neighboring provinces, giving the Japanese an excuse to occupy Manchuria (Tan, [1934] 1999).

In this charged environment, Sino-Babylonianism was transformed from a concept of time to a concept of space, aimed at mapping the boundaries of China and linking the Chinese homeland to its surrounding territories. For instance, in the 1920s, the historian Gu Shi (1878–1956) published a series of articles criticizing the supporters of Sino-Babylonianism. Focusing on studies of *Mu tianzi zhuan*, he blamed Jiang Zhiyou for being misled by "heretical teaching" (*xieshuo*) in discussing the Western origin of the Chinese race (Gu, 1934: 43). He faulted Ding Qian for "not knowing the impetuous tides of his time" (*bucha yishi zhi kuangchao*) in locating the kingdom of Xi Wang Mu in Assyria (p. 32). He criticized Liu Shipei for unwittingly lending support to the European colonists by succumbing to their misleading theories (pp. 30–31).[14]

While Gu Shi attacked the supporters of Sino-Babylonianism on ideological grounds, Miao Fenglin found fault in their historical sources. In a long article published in 1930, Miao reminded readers that there was no hard evidence of the alleged migration from Mesopotamia to China in prehistoric times, nor were there historical records verifying a continuous cultural diffusion from West Asia to China (Miao, 1930). As a result, the supporters of Sino-Babylonianism had to "distort history to support an erroneous opinion" (*qushuo pengfu*) (Miao, 1930: 5). Their historical distortion, Miao claimed, had turned early China into a land of fantasy. In the mid-1930s, Miao's view of Sino-Babylonianism gained wide acceptance among young historians. Zhang Gongliang, for example, wrote at length criticizing Ding Qian and Liu Shipei for spreading an erroneous view on early China (Zhang, 1934b).

In the 1930s, Miao Fenglin and Zhang Gongliang had ample reason for calling Sino-Babylonianism a fantasy. In an ironic twist of history, it was empirical study that turned out to be Lacouperie's biggest enemy (Leibold, 2006:

199–206). In the late nineteenth century, Sino-Babylonianism was hailed as a shining example of the "science of history." In the 1930s, Sino-Babylonianism was deemed "unscientific," because archaeological findings showed that the Chinese had independently developed an advanced civilization. Research by European and Chinese scientists such as J. Gunnar Andersson, Emile Licent, Pierre de Chardin, and Li Ji led to three archaeological findings that challenged the validity of Sino-Babylonianism: Neolithic pottery in western Henan, "painted pottery" in southern Shanxi, and the fossil remains of "Peking Man" on the outskirts of Peiping (Fan, 2008). From these discoveries, particularly the discovery of "Peking Man," it is clear that there was no single origin of Old World civilizations, nor was there a historical necessity for cultural diffusion to bring agriculture and metallurgy to China.[15] These discoveries demonstrated, as Kwang-chih Chang observes, that "the existence of early men in China during both prehistoric and early historic periods could no longer be doubted" (Chang, 1968: 5–6). With its main assumptions being challenged, Sino-Babylonianism became unconvincing. In 1930, writing in a tone as calm and confident as Lacouperie's half a century earlier, Miao Fenglin concluded that based on empirical evidence, "no ethnographer today will accept Babylon as the origin of human civilization" (Miao, 1930: 7).

Mapping the Territorial Boundary

Although by 1930 the main assumptions of Sino-Babylonianism had been undercut, Lacouperie's view about China's link to Mesopotamia still had an impact on Chinese historians. Beginning with Ding Qian, Sino-Babylonianism inspired Chinese historians to study texts such as *Mu tianzi zhuan* and *Shanhai jing* to trace the journey of King Mu of Zhou to various kingdoms in Central and West Asia. For Ding Qian, following Lacouperie, the journey of King Mu of Zhou exemplified the lingering sentimental attachment of the Chinese to their native land in Mesopotamia. In the 1920s and 1930s, as archaeological discoveries rendering the migration from Mesopotamia unsustainable, some Chinese historians shifted their focus to King Mu's journey, attempting to delineate the boundaries of the Zhou dynasty. Consequently, the role of *Mu tianzi zhuan* and *Shanhai jing* was reversed. The texts were no longer documents in support of the migration from Mesopotamia to China in prehistoric times. Instead, they became evidence of a powerful early China that had extensive control over Central and West Asia.

This change in role was particularly clear in the studies of *Mu tianzi zhuan*. Like the introduction of Sino-Babylonianism in the 1900s, the Chinese

discussion of *Mu tianzi zhuan* in the 1920s and 1930s evolved in tandem with what was happening outside China. Although skeptical of Sino-Babylonianism when Lacouperie proposed it in the late nineteenth century, European sinologists studied *Mu tianzi zhuan* to locate the places where King Mu of Zhou had visited. One contentious issue was the location of the kingdom of Xi Wang Mu. Because it was one of the far-flung places that King Mu visited before returning to China, finding its location meant mapping the extent of China's influence in ancient times (Mathieu, 1978: 1–2, 173–78). For sinologists like A. Forke and H. A. Giles, the ruler of Xi Wang Mu was the queen Saba of Arabia, and therefore the kingdom of Xi Wang Mu must have been located in Arabia (Forke, 1904; Giles, 1905). Other sinologists, like Leopold de Saussure, adopted Lacouperie's view that the kingdom of Xi Wang Mu was located in Xinjiang, and King Mu never traveled beyond northwest China (Saussure, 1920a, 1920b, 1921). Saussure's view was shared by the Japanese scholar Ogawa Takuji (1870–1941), who contended that King Mu did not travel beyond what is today Xinjiang (Ogawa, 1928–1929: 165–408). But Ogawa saw King Mu's journey somewhat differently. Unlike European sinologists who used King Mu's journey to prove the Chinese sentimental link to Mesopotamia, Ogawa argued that the purpose of King Mu's journey was to check on the newly acquired lands of the Zhou in the Tarim Basin, something that the Chinese emperors would normally do in the Ming and Qing dynasties (pp. 401–6).

Like sinologists in Europe and Japan, Chinese scholars were evenly divided in interpreting *Mu tianzi zhuan*. On the one hand, scholars like Miao Fenglin, Wei Juxian (1898−1989), and Zhang Gongliang accepted Saussure's and Ogawa's conclusion that King Mu never traveled beyond northwest China (Wei, 1929; Zhang Gongliang, 1934b). They were particularly impressed by Ogawa's writings, which were translated twice into Chinese in the 1930s.[16] They frequently cited Ogawa's meticulous calculation of the distance of King Mu's journey, and considered it the most accurate reconstruction of King Mu's itinerary. From Ogawa's detailed summary of Western scholarship, they learned of the recent studies of *Mu tianzi zhuan* in Europe. Most important of all, they accepted Ogawa's conclusion that as early as the Western Zhou, the Tarim Basin was already part of Chinese territory (Miao, 1930: 11; Zhang Gongliang, 1934a: 15). On the other hand, other Chinese scholars accepted the view of Forke and Giles, claiming that King Mu traveled to West Asia. Among them, Gu Shi made a most interesting argument. Based on textual analysis and geographical studies, he made three claims. First, the kingdom of Xi Wang Mu was located in Persia, near Teheran (Gu, 1934: 3). While this was not as far as Arabia, which Forke and Giles had

claimed to be the destination of King Mu, it was no doubt in the heartland of West Asia. Second, the female ruler Xi Wang Mu, who successfully established a Chinese state in Persia, was a daughter of King Mu (pp. 20–21). Third, King Mu's journey was to serve both familial and strategic purposes. It was in part a father's visit to his daughter, renewing a family relationship; it was also a reaffirmation of China's presence in West Asia, showing the Chinese interest in that part of the world (pp. 32–33).

Outlandish as his account may seem, Gu Shi shared assumptions with other scholars of *Mu tianzi chuan*. In Gu Shi's account, King Mu certainly traveled far beyond what the Chinese would normally consider their territories, and his claim of Chinese influence in West Asia would appear to some as ethnocentric or imperialistic. But knowingly or unknowingly, Gu accepted Ogawa's observation that King Mu was on an imperial expedition to check on the newly acquired areas. Apparently, Gu was more extreme in his claim about China's influence in West Asia. Nevertheless, he was concerned with Chinese territorial sovereignty, which seemed to be violently challenged in his time by the Japanese control of Manchuria.[17] More important, in claiming Chinese influence in West Asia, Gu publicly turned against Lacouperie's Sino-Babylonianism. For Gu, King Mu's journey showed that it was not the West Asians who migrated to China to spread agriculture and advanced metallurgy; on the contrary, it was the Chinese who migrated to West Asia to spread their advanced civilization. The most significant "revelation" (*qishi*) of King Mu's journey, Gu claimed, was that ancient Chinese brought higher civilization to other places, in the same manner as the Aryans and the Romans did respectively to India and the Mediterranean region (Gu, 1934: 2–3).

The World System of Nation-States

Thus, in Gu Shi's hands, the meaning of Sino-Babylonianism was completely reversed. Instead of Chinese importing political and cultural skills from Mesopotamia as Lacouperie had suggested, Gu argued that ancient Chinese actually exported those skills to foreign lands. In the span of three decades, Lacouperie's theory of the "Western origin of Chinese civilization" was transformed into Gu's theory of the "Chinese expansion into West Asia."[18] This reversal in China's role in ancient times indicated a sea change in Chinese historical consciousness. In the 1900s, Chinese historians were eager to link China to Mesopotamia, viewing China as part of the global network of cultural encounters. In the 1930s, however, they were preoccupied with marking the Chinese territories, attempting to define the extent of

Chinese territorial sovereignty in an increasingly hostile and volatile world of imperialism and colonialism. In both times, Sino-Babylonianism helped to shape Chinese historians' interpretation of the past, and provided them with a framework to link China to the world. Yet the different political environments drove them to interpret the past differently and to construct dissimilar national identities.

As such, the change in meaning of Sino-Babylonianism tells us how the Chinese perceived the world system of nation-states. When the Chinese understood the system of nation-states as a hierarchy in time, Sino-Babylonianism motivated them to build a nation-state similar to those in Europe and America. When the Chinese understood the system of nation-states as a hierarchy in space, Sino-Babylonianism became a rallying point to protect China's territorial sovereignty. In both instances, Sino-Babylonianism was no longer what Lacouperie had proposed in the late nineteenth century. It was a "translingual practice" where the Chinese adopted, transformed, and appropriated a foreign concept to understand the system of nation-states.

Notes

1. The discussion of time and space was popular among Chinese thinkers at the turn of the twentieth century. For a study of late Qing conceptions of time and space, see Tang (1996).
2. For the debate on how to render Xi Wang Mu, see Giles (1905) and Fracasso (1988). For a recent example of rendering Xi Wang Mu as a female deity, see Cahill (1993).
3. See the exchanges between Lacouperie, Robert K. Douglas, Charles de Harlez, and James Legge in *The Academy*, 536 (Aug. 12, 1882): 121–22; 543 (Sept. 30,

1882): 245–46; 544 (Oct. 7, 1882): 264; 744 (Aug. 7, 1886): 91–92; 747 (Aug. 28, 1886): 140; 759 (1886): 348–49. For a summary of the debate, see Girardot (2002: 384–92) and Hacker et al. (2002: 231–35).

4. According to Ishikawa Yoshihiro, Miyake Yonekichi and Kuwakara Jitsuzō first introduced Lacouperie's theory to Japan in 1894. But it was in 1900 that the best-seller *Shina bunmei shi* made Lacouperie's theory popular in Japan. See Ishikawa (2003: 22).

5. For a discussion of historical debates in Meiji Japan, see Tanaka (1993, 2004).

6. According to Ishikawa Yoshihiro, Japanese academic circles were well aware of sinologists' criticisms of Lacouperie's theory (Ishikawa, 2003: 22). Yet Shirakawa Jirō and Kokubu Tanenori decided not to mention the criticisms in *Shina bunmei shi*.

7. See "Wudi benji" (Basic annals of the Five Emperors) in Sima Qian (1959: 1–48). For a translation of the basic annals, see Chavnnes (1967: 25–96) and Nienhauser (1994: 1–20).

8. In the 1930s, Miao Fenglin wrote at length to sort out the ambiguity in Sima Qian's account. After much research and study, Miao bemoaned that there had been so many different genealogies of the Five Emperors that it was almost impossible to figure out who they really were. See Miao ([1933] 1995: 22–25).

9. The serialization of "Zhongguo renzhong kao" in *Xinmin zongbao* began in issue no. 35 (Aug. 1903) and continued intermittently until issue no. 60 (Jan. 1905). In citing "Zhongguo renzhong kao," I use Jiang (1929), which collected and reprinted his various segments printed in *Xinmin zongbao*.

10. Later, in the 1920s, Jiang Zhiyou rejected his own view when writing the article "Zhongguo minzu xi lai bian" (Refuting the [theory of] the Western origin of the Chinese). The article appears as an attachment to Jiang (1929).

11. In citing *Guocui xuebao*, I use the Taipei reprint version, which gives continuous page numbers.

12. On the concept of "world time" and its significance in modern European history, see Braudel (1992: 19–20, 71–88). As Arif Dirlik points out, world time is not universal time. While those who are at the center of the world system of commerce and trade live in world time, the majority of people on the periphery of the world system live in their local times and "partake in world time only voyeuristically" (Dirlik, 2007: 29–32).

13. For a discussion of how the acceptance of a "simple, normative temporality" helps developing societies to locate their positions in global development, see Harootunian (2000: ix–xxxii). Note that Harootunian calls the acceptance of a simple, normative temporality a "time-lag strategy." He argues that the strategy sometimes backfires, causing non-Western societies to be "overcome by modernity."

14. The reason that Zhang Taiyan was not attacked is that he changed his views on Sino-Babylonianism in the 1910s. See Ishikawa (2003: 21).

15. Archaeological discoveries did not completely discredit Sino-Babylonianism. In fact, the archaeological discoveries of Andersson and his colleagues seemed to provide new "scientific" and "material evidence" for Lacouperie's theory. See Leibold (2006: 158–59) and Wang (2000: 98–125).

16. A translation of Ogawa's study of *Mu tianzi zhuan* appeared in Jiang Xia'an ([1931] 1990: 93–255). Another translation appeared in *Yugong banyuekan* 7, 6–7 (June 1937): 125–39.

17. In the mid 1930s, *Yugong banyuekan* published several articles criticizing the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. For example, Feng Jiasheng discussed the political agenda of the Japanese studies of the history of Manchuria. See Feng (1934, 1935, 1936).

18. In his review of Gu Shi's writings, Zhang Gongliang attributed this reversal of position to imperialism. He saw Gu Shi's exaggeration of the Chinese influence in West Asia as a perverse response to the European domination of China. See Zhang (1935).

References

BRAUDEL, FERNAND (1992) Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century. Vol. 3. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

BUDGE, E. A. WALLIS (1925) The Rise and Progress of Assyriology. London: Martin Hopkinston.

CAHILL, SUZANNE E. (1993) Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press.

CHANG, KWANG-CHIH (1968) The Archaeology of Ancient China. Revised and enlarged edition. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.

CHAVNNES, ÉDOUARD (1967) Les Mémoires Historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien. Paris: Libraire D'Amerique et D'orient.

CHOW, KAI-WING (1997) "Imagining boundaries of blood: Zhang Binglin and the invention of the Han 'race' in modern China." Pp. 34–52 in Frank Dikötter (ed.), The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press.

CORDIER, HENRY (1893) "Half a century of Chinese studies (1886–1891)." T'oung Pao 3: 532–63.

DIKÖTTER, FRANK (1992) The Discourse of Race in Modern China. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press.

——— [ed.] (1997) The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press.

DING QIAN ([1915] 1962) "Mu tianzi zhuan dili kaozheng" (A geographical study of Mu tianzi zhuan). Pp. 1301–1416 in Penglai xuan dilixue congshu (Geographical writings of Penglai Pavilion, vol. 2). Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju.

DIRLIK, ARIF (2007) Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

DUARA, PRASENJIT (1995) Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

——— (1997) "Transnationalism and the predicament of sovereignty: China, 1900–1945." American Historical Rev. 102, 4: 1030–51.

——— (2003) Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

EDKINS, JOSEPH (1871) China's Place in Philology: An Attempt to Show That the Languages of Europe and Asia Have a Common Origin. London: Trübner.

FAN, FA-TI (2008) "How did the Chinese become native? Science and the search for national origins in the May Fourth era." Pp. 183–208 in Kai-wing Chow, Tze-ki Hon, Hung-yok Ip, and Don C. Price (eds.), Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity. Lanham, MD: Lexington.

FANG HAO (1954) Zhongxi jiaotong shi (History of Sino-Western exchanges). Taipei: Zhonghua wenhua chuban shiye weiyuanhui.

FENG JIASHENG (1934) "Wo de yanjiu dongbei shidi de jihua" (My plan for studying the historical geography of northeast China). Yugong banyuekan 1, 10: 2–6.

——— (1935) "Dongbei shidi yanjiu zhi yiyou chengji" (The state of the field in the study of the historical geography of northeast China). Yugong banyuekan 2, 10: 2–8.

——— (1936) "Riren duiyu wo dongbei de yanjiu jinzhuang" (Recent development in Japanese studies of northeast China). Yugong banyuekan 5, 6: 1–5.

FITZGERALD, JOHN (1996) Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

FORKE, A. (1904) "Mu Wang und die Königh von Saba." Mitteilnngen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen 7: 117–72.

FRACASSO, RICCARDO (1988) "Holy Mothers of ancient China: a new approach to the Hsi-wang-mu problem." T'oung Pao, 74: 1–40.

GILES, HERBERT ALLEN (1905) "Who was Si Wang Mu?" Adversaria Sinica ser. 2, 1: 1–19.

GIRARDOT, NORMAN J. (2002) The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

GREENHALGH, PAUL (1998) Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939. Manchester, UK: Manchester Univ. Press.

GU SHI (1934) Mu tianzi zhuan xizheng jiangshu (Explications of the western expeditions in Mu tianzi zhuan). Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan.

HACKER, EDWARD, STEVE MOORE, and LORRAINE PATSCO (2002) I Ching: An Annotated Bibliography. New York: Routledge.

HAN QI (1998) "Bai Jin de Yijing yanjiu he Kangxi de shidai de 'xi xue zhong yuan' lun" (Bouvet's Yijing studies and the discussion of the Eastern origin of Western learning during the reign of Kangxi). Hanxue yanjiu 16, 1: 185–202.

HAROOTUNIAN, HARRY (2000) Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

HON, TZE-KI (2003) "National essence, national learning, and culture: historical writings in Guocui xuebao, Xueheng, and Guoxue jikan." Historiography East and West 1, 2: 242–86.

——— (2004) "Revolution as recovery: the use of history in Minbao and Guocui xuebao." Asian Profile 32, 1: 7–19.

——— (2007) "Educating the citizens: Visions of China in late Qing history textbooks." Pp. 79–105 in Tze-ki Hon and Robert J. Culp (eds.), The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China. Leiden: Brill.

HUANG JIE (1905) "Huang shi" (History of the Yellow). Guocui xuebao 1, 1: 47–60.

ISHIKAWA, YOSHIHIRO (2003) "Anti-Manchu racism and the rise of anthropology in early 20th century China." Sino-Japanese Studies 25: 7–26.

JIANG XIA'AN [ed.] ([1931] 1990) Xian Qin jingji kao (Studies of classical texts of the pre-Qin period). Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe.

JIANG ZHIYOU (1929) Zhongguo renzhong kao (A study of the origins of the Chinese race). Shanghai: Huatong shuju.

KARL, REBECCA A. (2002) Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press.

LACOUPERIE, TERRIEN DE (1887) The Languages of China Before the Chinese. London: David Nutt.

——— (1888) The Old Babylonian Characters and Their Chinese Derivates. London: Babylonian and Oriental Record.

——— (1892a) The Oldest Book of the Chinese: The Yh-king and Its Authors. London: D. Nutt.

——— (1892b) Catalogue of Chinese Coins. London from the VIIth Cent. B.C., to A.D. 621. British Museum.

——— (1894) Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilisation from 2,300 B.C. to 200 A.D. London: Asher.

——— ([1894] 1965) Beginnings of Writing in Central and Eastern Asia. Osnabrück: Otto Zeller.

LEIBOLD, JAMES (2006) "Competing narratives of racial unity in Republican China: from the Yellow Emperor to Peking Man." Modern China 32, 2: 181–220.

LIU, LYDIA H. (1995) Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press.

LIU SHIPEI (1997) Liu Shenshu yishu (Collected writings of Liu Shenshu). Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe.

LUO XIANGLIN (1955) Zhongguo minzu shi (History of the Chinese nation). Taipei: Zhonghua wenhua chuban shiyi she.

MATHIEU, RÉMI (1978) Le Mu Tianzi Zhuan: Traduction Annotée, Étude Critique. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

MIAO FENGLIN (1930) "Zhongguo minzu youlai lun" (On the origin of the Chinese race). Shixue zazhi 2, 2: 1–18.

——— ([1933] 1995) Zhongguo tongshi yaoluë (Brief history of China). Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan.

MINZ, SIDNEY W. (1985) Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History. New York: Penguin.

MUNGELLO, DAVID E. (1985) Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press.

——— (2005) The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800. 2nd edition. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

NIENHAUSER, WILLIAM H. JR. [ed.] (1994) The Grand Scribe's Records. Vol. 1. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press.

OGAWA TAKUJI (1928–1929) Shina rekishi chiri kenkyū (Historical geographical studies of China). Kyoto: Kōbundō shobō.

POMERANZ, KENNETH and STEVEN TOPIK (1999) The World That Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400 to the Present. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

RYDELL, ROBERT W. (1984) All the World's a Fair. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

SAID, EWARD W. (1994) Culture and Imperialism. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

SAUSSURE, LEOPOLD DE (1920a) "The calendar of the Muh t'ien tse chuen." New China Rev. 2: 513–16.

——— (1920b) "Le voyage du roi Mou au Turkestan Oriental." Journal Asiastique, second series, 16: 151–56.

——— (1921) "La relation des voyages du roi Mou su Xéme siècle avant J. C." Journal Asiastique, second series, 17: 247–80.

SAYCE, A. C. (1894) A Primer of Assyriology. London: Religious Tract Society.

SCHLEGAL, GUSTAVE (1891) "China or Elam." T'oung Pao 2: 244–46.

SHEN SONGQIAO (1997) "Wo yi wo xue jian xuan yuan: Huangdi shenhua yu wan Qing de guozu jiangou" (Paying homage to the reverent deity with my blood: the myth of the Yellow Emperor and the late-Qing construction of race). Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan 28, 2: 1–77.

SHIRAKAWA JIRŌ and KOKUBU TANENORI (1900) Shina bunmei shi (History of Chinese civilization). Tokyo: Hakubunkan.

SIMA QIAN (1959) Shiji (Records of the grand scribe). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.

SMITH, RICHARD (2001) "Jesuit interpretations of the Yijing (Classic of Changes) in historical and comparative perspective." Paper presented at the conference "Matteo Ricci and After: Four Centuries of Cultural Interactions between China and the West," City Univ. of Hong Kong, Oct. 13–16.

TAN QIXIANG ([1934] 1999) "Yugong banyuekan fakanci" (The publication notice of Bimonthly of Historical Geography). Pp. 77–82 in Tan Qixiang, Jiusuo shikong (In search of time and space). Tianjin: Beihua wenyi chubanshe.

TANAKA, STEFAN (1993) Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

——— (2004) New Times in Modern Japan. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

TANG, XIAOBING (1996) Global Space and the National Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press.

The Academy (1882–1886) London.

WANG ERMIN (2005) "Zhongxi xue yuanliu shuo suo fanying zhi wenhua xinli quxiang" (Psychological tendencies reflected in the discussion of the origins of Western and Chinese learning). Pp. 44–67 in Zhongguo jindai sixiang shi lun xuji (Studies of modern Chinese intellectual history, second volume). Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe.

WANG, FAN-SEN (2000) Fu Ssu-nien: A Life in Chinese History and Politics. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

WEI JUXIAN (1929) "Mu tianzi yanjiu" (Studies of Mu tianzi [zhuan]). Pp. 1–47 in Gushi yanjiu (Studies of ancient China) vol. 2. Nanjing: Nanjing guwu baocun suo.

WEI TINGSHENG (1970) Mu tianzi zhuan jin kao (A recent study of Mu tianzi zhuan). Taipei: Zhonghua xueshuyuan.

XU GUOQI (2005) China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

YAN FU ([1904] 1981) Shehui tong quan (Principles of society). Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan.

ZHANG GONGLIANG (1934a) "Mu zhuan shan jing he zheng" (Combined studies of Mu [tianzi] zhuan and Shan [hai] jing). Yugong banyuekan 1, 5: 6–15.

——— (1934b) "Mu zhuan zhi banben ji guanyu Mu zhuan zhi zhushu" (The editions of Mu tianzi zhuan and their composition). Yugong banyuekan 2, 6: 18–26.

——— (1935) "Gu Shi zhu Mu tianzi zhuan xizheng jiangshu pinglun" (A review of "Explications of the western expeditions in Mu tianzi zhuan" by Gu Shi). Yugong banyuekan 3, 4: 31–46.

ZHANG TAIYAN (1984) "Xu zhong xing shang" (On the characteristics of the [Chinese] race). Pp. 170–96 in Zhang Taiyan quanji (Collected writings of Zhang Taiyan), vol. 3. Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe.

ZHENG SHIQU (1997) Wan Qing guocui pai—wenhua sixiang yanjiu (The national essence group of the late Qing: a study of culture and thought). Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe.

Biography

Tze-ki Hon is professor of history at SUNY-Geneseo. He is the author of *The Yijing and Chinese Politics* (2005) and the coeditor of *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China* (2007) and *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm* (2008). He is completing a book on *Guocui xuebao*.