

Different Translations and Contested Meanings: Motor for the 1911 Revolution in China

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When the Western concept of ‘social’ was introduced to China via Japan in about 1898, the Japanese words 社会 (pronounced as *xiakayi*) was directly adopted by the intellectuals and the concept of the social was translated as 社会 (pronounced as *shèhui*) in the Chinese language. However, the indigenous Chinese characters 社会 did not have the same connotation as that carried by the Japanese words and, as a result, multiple meanings exist with the Chinese characters 社会 (*shèhui*). What makes this complex situation more contestable was that the concept of the social was also translated as *qún* (群) by some other intellectuals. Similar situation happened with the translation of the Western concept of the economic as *jīngjì* (经济) which adopted the Japanese words 經濟(*kezai*) and as *shēngjì xué* (生计学) which are traditional Chinese words. Though later *shèhui* and *jīngjì* survived their respective counterparts and became standard translations in Chinese, the early different translations, together with the different connotations in each translation, indicate different interpretations of the concepts of the social and the economic given by intellectuals of different educational backgrounds.

Drawing on the theories of conceptual history, this article examines a particular contest over concepts of the social and the economic, namely, the debate from 1905 to 1907 between two groups of intellectuals respectively represented by Sun Yet-san and Liang Qichao. In particular, the article investigates 1) how these two historical figures conceptualized the concepts of the social and the economic, 2) what are the potentials that determined their conceptualizations, and 3) in what way the conceptualizations served as a driving force for the 1911 revolution.

Intellectuals at the turn of the 20th century

For a better understanding of the debate over the concepts of the social and the economic, it is primarily important to examine the situations of the Chinese intellectuals at the turn to the 20th century. This is not only because the intellectuals were involved in the debate, but because they themselves introduced the new concepts. In fact, among those who went to study overseas around the year of 1900, most went to Japan, with the total number reaching 20,000 in 1904. These overseas Chinese students in Japan learned and then introduced Western ideas, either directly by adopting Japanese words or by translating from Western languages, and among those new ideas were the concepts of the social and the economic.

It should be noted that the growing process of the intellectuals as a prominent force in Chinese modern history was full of twists and turns. Most of the Chinese intellectuals came from the falling big feudal families, and they began to take its

shape as an emerging class after the Sino-Japanese War in 1894. But only four years later, that is, in 1898 when Wuxu Reforms failed, did these intellectuals experience a setback, with some retreating and turning back. This twist, however, did not stop the growing of the intellectuals, and some others continued to introduce Western ideas and fought against the feudalism. These “advanced” intellectuals eventually turned their patriotic spirit to revolutionary action, leaving behind those who remained to believe in feudalism and were known as reformists. In our case of the debate, we have as revolutionaries Sun Yet-san and his colleagues (for example, Hu Hanmin, Wang Jingwei, Chen Tianhua, Zhang Taiyan, Liao Zhongkai, Feng Ziyou and Song Jiaoren), on the one side, and Liang Qichao and his colleagues (such as Kang Youwei and Xu Fesu) as reformists on the other.

Sun Yat-sen and his Three Principles of the People

Sun Yat-sen (12 November 1866 – 12 March 1925) was an important historical figure both in terms of thought and action. His experience in the Western countries, whether being exiled there or raising money for his party, was a great source for his revolutionary thought. At first, Sun aligned himself with the reformists Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao who sought to transform China into a Western-style constitutional monarchy. In 1894, Sun wrote a long letter to Li Hongzhang, the governor-general of Zhili province and a reformer in the court, with suggestions on how to strengthen China, but he was rebuffed. From then on, Sun began to call for the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic.

Sun went to Hawaii in October 1894 and founded as the platform for future revolutionary activities *Xingzhong Hui*, which in Chinese means ‘Revive China Society’, to unveil the goal of a prospering China. Members were drawn mainly from Cantonese expatriates and from the lower social classes. The society holds the principle of ‘driving away the Man people, reserving Zhonghua, and building a united government’. In 1895 a coup he plotted failed, and some of his supporters were executed. For the next sixteen years Sun was an exile in Europe, the United States, Canada, and Japan, during which he was detained at the Chinese Legation in 1896 in London, where diplomats planned to kill him. Fortunately he was released twelve days later. He remained in London for another year when Sun could see the prosperity of the capitalist development, and at the same time he saw many social problems brought about by this development, such as the contrasted extremes of the rich and the poor, and the contradiction of the employers and the employees. Also during this year Sun learned the socialist thoughts, which was a great influence on his later developed Principle of Mínnshēng, one of his three Principles.

His American experience was also of a lasting influence. Sun attached particular importance to the ideas of Alexander Hamilton and Abraham Lincoln. It is widely agreed that the formulation of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, “government of the people, by the people, for the people”, had been the inspiration for Sun’s Three Principles of the People, which was eventually expressed as “driving away the Man people, reserving Zhonghua, building a united government, and averaging the land

ownership (驱除鞑虏, 恢复中华, 创立民国, 平均地权)". As his political philosophy, the Three Principles of the People (三民主义) was proclaimed in the preface of the first issue of *Min Bao*, the Party newspaper of *Tongmeng Hui* (the forerunner of Kuomintang) Sun founded in 1905 in Japan. He suggested using his Principles to establish ultimate peace, freedom, and equality in the country and devoted all efforts throughout his whole lifetime until his death for a strong and prosperous China and the well being of its people.

Sun's Three Principles of the People, also known as Three People's Principles, or collectively San-min Doctrine, is a political philosophy. It includes The Principle of *Mínzú*, the Principle of *Mínquán*, and the Principle of *Mínshēng*. We give a brief account of the principles in the following as we believe it is essential for the discussion of his conceptualization of the social and the economic.

The Principle of *Mínzú* (Min²-tsu², 民族主义 "The People's Relation/Connection" or "Government of the People") refers in general to Nationalism. By this, Sun meant freedom from imperialist domination. To achieve this he believed that China must develop a "civic-nationalism", *Zhōnghuā Mínzú*, as opposed to an "ethnic-nationalism", so as to unite all of the different ethnicities of China, mainly composed by the five major groups of Han, Mongols, Tibetans, Manchus, and the Muslims, which together are symbolized by the Five Color Flag of the First Republic (1911-1928). This sense of nationalism is different from the idea of "ethnocentrism", which equates to the same meaning of nationalism in Chinese language.

The Principle of *Mínquán* (Min²-ch'üan², 民权主义 "The People's Power" or "Government by the People") refers to Democracy. To Sun, it represented a Western constitutional government. He divided political life of his ideal for China into two sets of "powers": the power of politics and the power of governance. The former, also known as *zhèngquán* (政权), is the powers of the people to express their political wishes, similar to those vested in the citizenry or the parliaments in other countries, and is represented by the National Assembly. There are four of these powers: election (选举), recall (罢免), initiative (创制), and referendum (复决). These may be equated to "civil rights". The power of governance, also known as *zhìquán* (治权) is the powers of administration. Here he expanded the European-American constitutional theory of a three-branch government and a system of checks and balances by incorporating traditional Chinese administrative tradition to create a government of five branches, each of which is called a *yuàn* (院) or "court", such as the Legislative Yuan, the Executive Yuan, the Judicial Yuan, the Control Yuan, and the Examination Yuan.

The Principle of *Mínshēng* (Min²-sheng¹, 民生主义 "The People's Welfare or Livelihood" or "Government for the People") refers to what sometimes is translated as socialism. The concept may be understood as social welfare or as populist (e.g. for the people, or to the pleasure of the people) governmental measures. Sun understood it as an industrial economy and equality of land holdings for the Chinese peasant farmers. He divided livelihood into four areas: food, clothing, housing, and transportation; and planned out how an ideal (Chinese) government can take care of

these for its people.

Sun's pioneering thoughts did not only exist in its discourse form, but were put into action. On 10 October 1911, a military uprising at Wuchang began a process that ended the over-two-thousand-year imperial rule in China. Though he was not personally involved in the revolution (at that moment Sun was still in exile and Huang Xing was in charge of the revolution), Sun immediately returned to China from the United States when he learned from press reports the successful rebellion against the Qing emperor. Later, on 29 December 1911 a meeting of representatives from provinces in Nanjing elected Sun as the provisional President of the Republic of China and set 1 January 1912 as the first day of the first year of the Republic. It is because of his influence Sun is frequently referred to as the Father of the Nation.

Liang Qichao and his reformist ideas

Chinese intellectuals played an important role in history which is often metaphorically described as bridge and pioneer. Indeed, they combined their patriotic tradition with the Western democratic thought, arousing the mass consciousness of revolution on the one hand, and becoming revolutionaries themselves on the other. This, however, does not imply that all the intellectuals turned out to be revolutionaries, or at least be regarded revolutionaries. We have mentioned the twists and turns in the growing process of the Chinese intellectuals, and here we need to point out that there were intellectuals who remained to believe in the feudalism, hoping that the Qing dynasty would undergo reform by itself. Among these reformists are Kang Youwei and his student Liang Qichao.

Initially, Liang Qichao (23 February, 1873 – 19 January, 1929) was unhappy with the governance of the Qing Government and wanted to change the *status quo* in China. He organized reforms with Kang Youwei by putting their ideas on paper and sending them to Emperor Guangxu in 1898. This movement is known as the Wuxu Reform or the Hundred Days' Reform. Their proposal asserted that China was in need of more than "self-strengthening", and called for many institutional and ideological changes such as getting rid of corruption and remodeling the state examination system. However, opposed by Empress Cixi, the leader of the political conservative party who later took over the government as regent, this proposal soon ignited a frenzy of disagreement, and Liang was exiled to Japan.

Liang's exile to Japan, however, allowed him to a chance to speak freely and exercise his intellectual autonomy. In Japan, he continued to actively advocate democratic notions and reforms by using his writings to raise support from overseas Chinese and foreign governments. He edited two premier newspapers, *Zhongwai Gongbao* and *Shiwu Bao*. He also published his moral and political ideals in *Qing Yi Bao* and *Xinmin Congbao*. He continued to emphasize the importance of individualism, and to support the concept of a constitutional monarchy as opposed to the radical republicanism supported by *Tongmeng Hui*. In 1899, Liang went to Canada, where he met, among others, Sun Yat-Sen, then to Honolulu in Hawaii. During the Boxer Rebellion, Liang was back in Canada, where he formed the "Save

the Emperor Society” (保皇会). This organization later became the Constitutionalist Party which advocated constitutional monarchy. As Liang preached reform, he eventually became an opposite to Sun Yet-san who promoted revolution.

In short, the Chinese intellectuals at the turn to the 20th century were searching ways of building a strong China. They had overseas experiences, and had learned Western thoughts. They wanted to import these Western ideas into China. In addition, they involved themselves in political actions either by spreading their ideas or by participating in military battles. But disagreement occurred frequently, and one such case was how to understand the *status quo* in China. This was closely related with, and to some extent determined, their conceptualizations of the social and the economic, which we will discuss shortly.

Indigenous meanings and early translations

The western concept of the social and that of the economic are currently expressed in the Chinese language as *shèhuì* (社会) and *jīngjì* (经济), but this was not the case when they were first translated into Chinese. These accepted translations are not the result of a process which is free of struggle, but that in which translators of different educational backgrounds, with different understanding of the concepts, are entangled in debate and struggle, with competing interpretations. We will examine this process in more detail and hope to find some explanations.

The concept of the social and its translations

In the ancient Chinese language, *shèhuì* (社会) was used separately with discrete but related meanings: 社 (*shè*) means a place while 会 (*huì*) a meeting. Later on (around the Tang Dynasty) they were used together and gained a joint meaning, such as “the gathering of village people”, or “the organization people of common interest”. In about 1874 (the 7th year of Meiji) when the characters 社会 were borrowed and exported to the Japanese language, they roughly had the meaning of its kind, namely, the type of meaning that addressed the village people’s gathering.¹ Whether this meaning had been changed or not since then we do not know, but we can be assured that when they were used as translation of the Western concept of the social, *shèhuì* (社会) carried a different meaning from its original one and thus very different from its meaning in ancient Chinese. In other words, when they returned to the Chinese language towards the end of the 19th century, *shèhuì* (社会) represent the new concept of the social, a concept the Japanese learned from the West.

Then what meaning did the translated or ‘returned’ characters 社会(*shèhuì*) carry? As concepts are tied to words on the one hand, and refer to facts on the other,² we can understand that *shèhuì* as a translation represents the new, Western concept of the social that referred to facts that were unique in the Western society. In this sense, to

¹ It then had the meaning from Chen Yi’s words “乡民为社会” (Village people gathered at the place for offering sacrifices to the God of land).

² Niels Akerstrom Andersen, *Discursive Analytical Strategies* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2003), 36.

understand the meaning of the translated *shèhuì* meant to understand the facts in the West or, more exactly, the facts that the translators knew were true in the West.

A subsequent question then would be like this: who was the translator(s)? In other words, who was the person(s) that used the returned Chinese words to express their understanding of the Western situation? To find an answer to such a question would be helpful because if we knew the historical and educational background of the translators, we would get a key to the whole story why they used this instead of that word to translate the concept of the social.

Let's first examine the case in which the concept of the social was translated as *shèhuì*. It has already been noticed that *shèhuì* was a direct translation of Japanese *xiakayi*. Here are two specific examples. In 1896, there was an article in the newspaper of *Current Affairs* (《时务报》). Its title was 'on *shèhuì*'. This was an article translated from Japanese and the Japanese words were directly taken into the Chinese language to represent the concept of the social. This argument would be more strongly supported when we examine the Kang Youwei's translation of the concept of the social as *shèhuì*. Kang did not know the Japanese language, but he used the term *shèhuì* in his writings and translations. For example, in his "Memorial to the Qing Emperor" of January of 1898, Kang proposed 12 bureaus in his whole plan of Reform, the eleventh bureau being the 'bureau of society' (社会局).³ This can explain to some extent his direct adoption of the Japanese words *xiakayi* as the translation of the concept of the social.

Concerning our question of who is the translator, here we know, as a specific case, Kang Youwei adopted directly the Japanese word for the concept of the social. But *shèhuì* was not the only Chinese characters for the concept of the social round the turn to the 20th century. Another translation was, for example, *qún* (群), whose translator was Yan Fu, a famous scholar in the Chinese history who was considered as the father of *qún xué* (群学).

An example for this was Yan Fu's translation of Herbert Spencer's work *A Study of Sociology*. In 1903, Yan Fu translated the book title as *qún xué yì yān* (群学肄言). Obviously, Yan Fu did not take the then popular translation of *shèhuì* in his translation of the concept of sociology but used the Chinese word *qún* for this concept. To explain this, he quoted from Xue Zhi (荀卿子, about 313 B.C. – 213 B.C.), "the difference between human being and animal was that human being could form a crowd." (人之所以异于禽兽者, 以其能群也). It seems that Yan Fu's translation brings the concept of the social closer to the indigenous meaning of the original Chinese characters *shèhuì* (社会), that is, the gathering of people. Whether this argument holds water or not may remain to be a question of debate, but what is clear for the moment is that his adoption of *qún* rather than *shèhuì* as his translation of sociology was rooted in his inclination to the Chinese culture.

An obvious difference between the two translations was that *shèhuì* was the result of the direct adoption of the Japanese words while *qún* was used when the concept of the social was translated from Western languages. The two specific cases of translating the concept of the social indicate that different backgrounds of

³ See *Complete Works of Kang Youwei*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Chinese People's University Press, 2007), 15.

translators and their interpretation of the concept have much to do with their translations. In Yan Fu's case, traditional Chinese words were used for translating the Western concept as he was a specialist of Western learning nurtured in Chinese traditional culture. His deep-rooted belief in Chinese tradition, as is seen in his quotation of Xue Zhi to explain his translation, makes it possible for him to use traditional Chinese words for the Western concept. In Kang Youwei's case, the Japanese words were adopted directly as he was much inclined to Japanese leaning. Even so, it is worth noting that, while using the Japanese words for the concept of social, Kang Youwei added his interpretations to the translated word *shèhuì*, which varied, some being closer to the Western concept of social (e.g. referring to the institutional form of human common life), some being more related with the indigenous meaning (e.g. forming an association, or mass organization). Kang Youwei in fact used the words *shèhuì* for the Western concept of social but he incorporated his understanding of the new concept to the words of *shèhuì*.

The concept of the economic and its translations

Like the translation of the concept of the social, the translation of the concept of the economic has a complex story as well. Etymologically, the Chinese words *jīngjì* (经济), which is currently the accepted translation of the economic, is inherently more related with politics rather than economy in the Chinese language. For example, in the Chinese expressions *jīngbāng jìguó* (经邦济国), *jīngshì jìmín* (经世济民), *jīng* and *jì* meant to govern the country. From Song dynasty, *jīngjì* was used together and made its way into numerous book titles. Most of these books were used as references by candidates for the imperial examinations in Ming dynasty, and thus *jīngjì* was referred to the knowledge that was required by prospective officials. In Qing dynasty, it was more explicitly referred to an engagement with politics. What is meant by the West concept of the economic, however, is traditionally expressed by Chinese words like *shíhuò* (食货), *huòzhí* (货殖), *lǐcái* (理财), and *fùguó* (富国).⁴

For the translation itself, the Japanese term *kezai* (経済) was directly adopted when the concept of the economic was introduced from Japan. In the meanwhile, there were other translations, such as *fùguó cè* (富国策), *shēngjì xué* (生计学), and *yuánfù* (原富), which drew on the Chinese language. For example, the 1863 edition of *Manual of political economy* by H. Fawcett was translated under the title of *fuguo ce* in 1880, which marks the beginning of Chinese translation of the West concept of the economic. Later in 1902 Liang Qichao published *A Short History of the Evolution of Shēngjì Xué*, a book devoted to the introduction of the Western history of economic thought, where he used the expression of *shēngjì xué*. In 1901, Yan Fu translated Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, to which Yan gave the Chinese title as *yuánfù* (the origin of the wealth).

It is thus seen that the translation of the concept of the economic was made in two ways, one in which the Japanese words were directly adopted for the translation,

⁴ For more etymological development of *jingji*, see Yet Tan, Etymological studies of "Chinese economics", *Social Sciences in China*, winter, 1999.

and the other in which traditional Chinese words were chosen for the then new concept of the economic. This is a situation similar to the translation of the concept of the social, similar too when one observes that the two ways of translation have much to do with the translators' understanding of the concepts.

Translators' interpretation and their translations

In the above discussion of translations of the concept of the social and that of the economic, we can see a nexus of meanings at which the Western new and the indigenous old are mingled together. Whether by directly adopting the Japanese words *xiakayi* (社会) and *kezai* (經濟) or by using an indigenous Chinese word *qún* (群) and *shēngjì xué* (生计学), the Western concepts of the social and the economic were incorporated with the translators' understandings and interpretations. These understandings, we may argue tentatively, are constrained by the personal experience of the respective translators, for instance their educational background or the source materials they could get. In our examined cases, for example, when the concepts were translated from the Western (say, English) writings rather than from the Japanese writings, traditional Chinese expressions rather than Japanese words were adopted. To project this argument to the fact that *shèhuì* as a translation of the concept of social survived *qún*, and *jīngjì* survived other translations, it is safe to say that the reason for its survival may be the Japanese influence on China at that period of time. As we have mentioned earlier, many Chinese intellectuals were educated in Japan at the time round the turn of the 20th century, and that counts to a great extent in this matter.

Different conceptualizations and the 1911 revolution

In the process of introducing the two Western concepts into China, as is indicated in the above discussion, there were two general directions in terms of translation, one from Japan where the Japanese words were adopted, the other from the West learning where the Chinese words were used. Despite this difference, there were others, such as the difference of meanings given to the translated terms. For this we have noticed the intellectuals' different interpretations of the concepts. There might be other reasons, for example, the intellectuals put their own meanings to the concepts because they used the concepts to argue for their own political policy, that is, difference of conceptualizations.

Here a relevant example is the debate between the two groups of intellectuals (represented respectively by Sun Yet-san and Liang Qichao) from November 1905 to August 1907. The debate concerned a number of issues, twelve of which were ever summarized in an article entitled "Outline of the debate between *Min Bao* and *Xinmin Congbao*" published in *Min Bao* in April 1906, but key issues include the conceptualizations of the *status quo* of the then Chinese society and the ways by which to build a strong China. These two issues, so far as we understand from the perspective of conceptual history, can be related with the concepts of the social and the economic. Sun and his colleagues publicized their conceptualizations in *Min Bao*,

a newspaper Sun launched in 1905 in Tokyo Japan, while Liang and his colleagues publicized theirs in *Xinmin Congbao*, a newspaper of their side.⁵

Different conceptualizations of the social

Towards the year of 1905 the term *shèhuì* gradually survived *qún* and became a standard translation of the concept of the social,⁶ but the concept of the social was not yet uniquely conceptualized. Here in our case, for example, are two expressions: *mínshēng* (民生) as in Sun's conceptualization and *mínzú* (民族) in Liang's conceptualization.

Sun Yet-san's conceptualization

Mínshēng (民生) was the words Sun preferred to *shèhuì* (社会). In his "First Lecture on the Principle of *Mínshēng*", for example, Sun Yet-san pointed out that the word *mínshēng* (民生) was more appropriate than the words *social* and *communist* when referring to the social problems.⁷ By *mínshēng* Sun here referred to the living of the people, specifically the survival and the life of the people at a time when the invention of machinery deprived large number of people of their jobs. As survival was a big question to these people and at the same time to the society, the social problem was to Sun a *mínshēng* issue, or *shèhuì wèntí* (社会问题) in the Chinese language.

It is important to note that Sun's conceptualization of the social as *mínshēng* started in London when he saw the social problems resulting from the development of capitalism. His study of the problems such as inequality and tension between the capitalists and workers provided him an insight to look at the Chinese social problems. At the turn to the 20th century, China was at a time usually termed as "*Qīngmò Míngchū*" (Late Qing dynasty and early *Mínguó*), when the traditional Chinese agriculture was backward while modern industry had not taken its shape. Wars and draughts continuously hit people who ran short of food, clothing and shelter. To represent the *status quo* of the society Sun used the word *mínshēng* instead of *shèhuì* to suggest that he concerned himself with the ordinary individuals. By this down-to-earth conceptualization of the social, Sun actually made a thorough and detailed analysis of the problems that existed at that period of time in China.

The primary social problem Sun identified was the poverty of the peasant farmers. This was a big social problem, not only that farming was the most important means for making a living, but that the peasants constituted the most majority of the

⁵ Actually, Sun only wrote an article on his Three Principles of the People, published on the first issue of *Minbao*. His colleagues such as Hu Hanmin, Wang Jingwei, Chen Tianhua, Zhang Taiyan, Huang Kai, Feng Ziyou and Zhu Zixin wrote most of the articles for *Minbao*. For *Xinmin Congbao*, Liang Qichao himself wrote, occasionally helped by Kang Youwei and Xu Fesu.

⁶ For example, Yan Fu himself no longer used *qún* for translating the concept of social in 1904 when he translated J. W. Jenks' *A Short History of Politics*.

⁷ Sun Yet-san, "First Lecture on the Principle of *Mínshēng*", in *Works of Sun Yet-san*, Vol. 9, p.365. 孙中山, "民生主义 第一讲"《孙中山全集》第九卷 第 365 页。We have advocated the principle of *mínshēng* for 20 years. At the beginning we studied and medicated, and finally we realized that '*mínshēng*' is a word to include social problem than 'social' or 'communist' does, as this wording is appropriate, clear and to the point. Therefore we adopted this word. (我们提倡民生主义二十多年, 当初详细研究, 反覆思维, 总是觉得用"民生"这两个字来包括社会问题, 较之用"社会"或"共产"等名词为适当, 切实而且明了, 故采用之。)

population. Most peasants did not have their own land to plant but planted on the land of the landowners and, as a result, most of what they produced went to the landowners or landlord. Relevant to this problem of the peasants was the women's situation. For a very long time before the 1911 revolution women in China were dominated by their families and husbands; they were deprived of the right to education and were mostly illiterate and positioned at the bottom of the society. In addition, there existed the problem of the hooligans. Due to the famine and the poverty, some poor people dared to do anything to survive, including doing something to damage the society, thus became hooligans.

Sun also identified as social problems some old customs that are inhumane and actually hindered the progress of the society. Among these customs are, for example, foot-binding (缠足) (the feet of women being wiped with long cloth), pigtail (辫子) (man having their long plaits on their heads), concubines (纳妾) (man having more than one wives, known as concubines), and address form (称谓) where “*dàrén* (大人)” and “*lǎoyé* (老爷)” are used to address officials in government and landlord at home by the inferiors.

Sun's concern with the down-to-earth social problems in a way indicates his interpretation and understanding of the newly imported concept of the social, but what is more important of such a conceptualization is that he advocated his way of doing socialism. In fact, his conceptualization of the social as *mínshēng* instead of *shèhuì* was a sign of his association with the concept of socialism as he believes that the social problems can only be solved by way of socialism. In a letter to a friend on 17 December 1903, for example, Sun wrote: “To know socialism is what I must think and must not forget. What I argued for is to average the land ownership. This is what we really can do now in this country.” In a speech at the welcome party by Shanghai Zhonghua Industry Association, 17 April 1912, Sun openly pointed out that “the Principle of *Mínshēng* can not be fully realized without doing socialism.”

Sun Yet-san began to be acquainted with the concept of socialism when he was in London between September 1896 and July 1897, during which, according to Song Qingling, his wife, Sun read *On Capital*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and other socialist books and articles.⁸ In addition, Sun had personally seen various social problems of the capitalist society. He wrote, for example, “There is no equality in Europe and America, and this will lead to big conflict which can result in equality. Now in our revolution, why do we not average the rich and the poor? Why do we leave this till the inequality gets worse?”⁹ Here Sun actually advocated an important idea of socialism, for which he further argued that the rich are not allowed to exploit the poor, and the poor must have opportunity to compete for their benefits. The socialist thoughts Sun received by far provided him an insight for looking ways of

⁸ 宋庆龄, 1992, 《宋庆龄选集》, 北京: 人民出版社. Song Qingling, *Selected Works of Song Qingling* (Beijing: People's Press, 1992), 370, 537.

⁹ “所询社会主义, 乃弟所极思不能须臾忘者。弟所主张在于平均地权, 此为吾国今日可以切实施行之事。” “欧美近日只不平均, 他时必有大冲突, 已趋剂于平均可断言也。然则今日吾国改革, 何故不为贫富不均计, 而留此一重罪业, 以待他日更衍惨境乎?” 孙中山, 1981, 《孙中山全集(第1卷)》, 北京: 中华书局, p.228. Sun Yet-san, *Works of Sun Yet-san*, Vol. 1, (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1981), 228.

solving the social problems in China.

In terms of translation, the concept of socialism was brought to China by the Chinese intellectuals from Japan¹⁰, and it did not have a definite translation among the Chinese intellectuals towards the end of 19th century. In his first lecture on the Principle of *Mínshēng*, for example, Sun Yet-san translated the very term ‘socialism’ phonetically into Chinese as “梳西利基(*suxiliji*)”. He wrote: “In fact, the English word ‘socialism’ is derived from Greek, which means ‘comrade’. This meaning is similar to ‘fellow’ in colloquial Chinese.”(其实英文中的社会主义“梳西利基”那具字, 是从希腊文变出来的, 希腊文社会主义的原意是“同志”, 就象中国俗话说说是“伙计”两个字一样。)¹¹ As *shèhuì* later became a standard translation of the concept of the social, *shèhuì zhǔyì* (社会主义) was taken as the translation of the concept of socialism. Here, the last two characters *zhǔyì* (主义) in “社会主义” has the meaning of ‘doctrines’ or ‘theories’. Because of this, and also because Sun conceptualized ‘social’ as ‘*mínshēng*’, it is safe to say that Sun’s Principle of *Mínshēng* was what he conceptualized “socialism” before the 1911 revolution. For him, socialism was the principle of *Mínshēng*, both of which concerned with the social economical problems in the society.

The association of Sun’s principle of *mínshēng* with his conceptualization of “socialism” is clear when we examine the influence of socialism on Sun’s Principle of *mínshēng*. Sun’s Principle of *mínshēng* came into shape under the influence of the socialist thought around the beginning of the 20th century, by which several intellectuals had introduced the western thoughts of socialism into China. In March 1903, Ma Junwu published an article entitled as “Comparison between socialism and evolutionism”, in which he explained the connection and difference between socialism and evolutionism, and believed Marx was superior to Darwin. From January to April 1906, Zhu Zhixin published ‘Biography of German socialists’ in *Min Bao*, introducing Marx, Lassalle, Engels, and Bebel. He also introduced main points in *The Communist Manifesto* and the value of surplus. In 1906, Song Jiaoren introduced in *Min Bao* the world movement of socialism and Marxist revolutionary struggles. Liao Zhongkai also in *Min Bao* introduced the origin of socialist thought and the different stages of socialist development.¹² *Min Bao* was the newspaper where Sun Yet-san and his associates publicized their interpretation of the concept of the social and socialism, it was also a forum for advocating their way of doing socialism.

Liang Qichao’s conceptualization

Having examined Sun’s conceptualization of social and seen a socialist feature of his Principle of *Mínshēng*, I now move to examine the conceptualization of social by Liang Qichao. As a contemporary of Sun, Liang also saw China experiencing a

¹⁰ 姚德懷, 1996, ‘華語詞匯的整理和規範’, 1996年4月20-21日“華語语言文字應用規範化”學術講座, 馬來西亞吉隆坡。 <http://www.huayuqiao.org/articles/yaodehuai/yaodh02.htm>.

¹¹ 《三民主义·民生主义·第一讲》(1924年8月3日)《孙中山全集》第9卷 第355—358页 Sun Yet-san, First Lecture of *Minsheng*, August 3, 1924. *Works of Sun Yet-san*, Vol.9, pp.355-358.

¹² 姜义华, 1984, 《社会主义学说在中国的初期传播》, 上海: 复旦大学出版社, 第372-373页. Jiang Yihua, 1984. *Initial Spread of Socialism* (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 1984), 372-73.

radical change caused by the foreign invasion and inner poverty. However, he conceptualized the then social and economic problems as the general weakness of the nation as a whole. He believed that the beginning of 20th century was a time of competition for existence. For example, he wrote, “Today is a time when strong foreign nations stood many, with the strong beating the weak and the advantaged surviving the disadvantaged.” (今日列国并立，弱肉强食、优胜劣败之时代。¹³) According to him, at a time like this when one country as a whole nation competed with each other for survival, it was the nation’s economic power that determined the survival of the nation, and the problem with China was that China as a nation was weak in economy. Obviously, social problems to Liang Qichao did not mean food, clothing or shelter for individual peasants; rather, the problems were the overall weakness of the nation. Using the wording ‘nation’ (*mínzú* 民族 in Chinese) Liang was able to raise the social problems to a level at which the whole people of the country would die out as a result of other nations’ invasion. Thus this was the kind of problem of the whole *mínzú* (民族) or nation rather than that of the individuals.

Liang’s ideas of *mínzú* came from his reading of Western scholars’ works on the one hand, and his experience in Japan and America on the other. Several scholars believed that Liang’s stay in Japan after the failure of the Wuxu Reform enabled him of reading works of politics, economics, history and sociology by Western authors, which helped him develop his idea of nation. For example, Wang Dongyan maintains that Liang’s nationalism was greatly influenced by these Western thoughts.¹⁴ In an article “Differences and similarities in the change of thought on nation” in *Qingyi Bao* (清议报) in October 1901, Liang discussed the development of nationalism in the West and China. He wrote, “In Europe and America, nationalism and national imperialism have developed to their full extent, but in China have not taken its shape.” By nationalism he meant “that we don’t invade other nation and are not allowed to be invaded. Inside, we as people are independent, outside, we as country are independent.”¹⁵ Liang’s nationalism was further developed in 1903 when he traveled in the America where he was deeply impressed by the advance of the capitalism. It was during this travel that he attached more importance to his idea of developing China’s ability of national competition¹⁶.

It is worth a few lines here to note that Liang’s idea of *mínzú* was different from Sun’s Principle of *Mínzú*, one of Sun’s Three Principles. Liang’s concept of *mínzú* was what he envisaged the *status quo* of the Chinese society at the *Míngmò Qīngchū* period of time. By proposing the term *mínzú* Liang emphasized the danger of the nation as a whole dying out after the invasion of the strong foreign nations such as those from the West. It is in this sense, the sense of identifying social problems, that Liang’s *mínzú* can be compared to Sun’s *mínshēng*, with the latter emphasizing the problems of the food, clothes and shelter of the individuals. Sun’s Principle of *Mínzú*,

¹³ 梁启超:《新民说·释新民之义》,《饮冰室合集·专集之四》,第6页。Liang Qichao, “New discourse of people: explanation of the meaning of people”, *Works of Liang Qichao*, No4, P.6.

¹⁴ See Wang Dongyan, “Comparison research on Thought of Zhang Taiyan and Liang Qichao’s nationalism,” *Jilu Journal* 4 (2006): 53-4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See “Research on Liang Qichao’s nationalism,” *Journal of Central China Normal University* 39 (2000): 97-102.

however, referred to his doctrine of driving the Man people. By this Principle Sun proposed a kind of struggle that the Han people fight against the Man people, the aim of which was to overthrow the Qing dynasty. Thus, though both used the term *mínzú*, Sun and Liang applied different meanings to the term, with Sun addressing the struggle between Han and Man peoples while Liang addressing the contradiction between China (as nation-state) and the foreign countries. These different meanings attributed to the term *mínzú* would be of significance when we discuss the conceptualizations as motor of politics.

Different conceptualizations of the economic

Though the early translations for the concept of the economic were various, the term *jīngjì* survived others. No one has yet provided definite, convincing reasons for this survival, but when we observe that Sun and Liang were quite different in ways they proposed to do *jīngjì* (though both used the term *jīngjì*), we were reminded that *jīngjì* originally meant in Chinese ways of doing politics (such as in the Chinese expression *jīngbāng jìguó*). Here is the observation.

Sun Yet-san's conceptualization

In his second lecture on the Principle of *Mínshēng*, Sun dwelled on the solutions to the social problems, of which the essentials were 1) averaging landownership on the one hand (平均地权) and 2) restricting the capitals on the other (节制资本). By averaging landownership Sun meant to abolish the federal private system that allowed land to be owned by private landowners. By restricting the capitals he meant to restrict the private capitals and develop national capitals so that the big capitalists could not manipulate the national economy. He believed that these two methods are enough to solve the social problems.¹⁷

For averaging landownership Sun proposed detailed plans, which constitute four strategies to gain equality in the land ownership among peasants. The aim of this land revolution is to provide the poor with food, clothing and shelter by allocating land to those who are in need. The first strategy is to affirm the price of the land (核定天下地价), that is, the landowners report the price of their land, and the government record the reported price in the title deed. The second strategy is to decide the tax based on the price (照价征税), that is, tax is no longer asked according to *mu* (a measuring unit of land) but based on the price of the land. At that time, tax rate was set as 1%. The third strategy is to purchase based on the price (照价收买), that is, when necessary, the government purchases the land according to the price recorded in the title deed. The fourth strategy is to attribute the profit of the land to the country (土地涨价归公), that is, if the price of the land gets higher than reported, the profit of the land belongs to the country, and enjoyed by everyone. To carry out this principle of equality in land ownership, Sun hoped that the peasants, once they have their land to plant, only give tax to the government, and no longer were the landowners allowed to gain any tax. Thus the equality of the society achieved.

¹⁷ See Sun Yet-san, Second Lecture on the Principles of *Mínshēng*.

To accompany this first revolution on land, Sun proposed another revolution to be carried out simultaneously, the aim of which is to prevent the private capitals from being manipulated. In other words, the aim of the second revolution is to restrict the private capitals. For this, he wrote, “Businesses run by Chinese and foreigners, if they grow too big to be run by private, such as bank, railway and air transportation, are to be managed by the government. This is an essential principle of restricting capitals, that is, we do not allow private capitals to manipulate the national economy.”¹⁸

Here we can see that by “launching political and social revolutions” and by taking “the two revolutions of demolishing the manual means of production and nationalizing the capitals” Sun clearly expressed his way of building the country. These proposals, together with others such as developing transportations by building railways and seaports and utilizing foreign capitals, are outlines of his thoughts concerning his conceptualization of economic. For Sun, the concept of economic was not something theoretical but practical solutions to the social problems. In this sense, his conceptualization of economic was of action, that is, the two simultaneously carried-out revolutions, as was called by himself in his Introduction to *Min Bao* (民报发刊辞) as ‘political and social revolutions’.¹⁹

Sun’s conceptualization of economic had a close relation with his study of the capitalism while he was in London. As he realized in his Industrial Plan (实业计划), the European and American problems were only identified decades later and therefore could not be deprived of. Drawing on the lessons from the capitalist development, Sun wanted to prevent such problems from happening in China by launching the two revolutions. He further pointed out, China had not entered the industrial revolution and manual labour was still the principal means of production. This was not like the Europe-American societies which were facing the second revolution for that moment. Therefore, China had to simultaneously take the two revolutions of demolishing the manual means of production and nationalizing the capitals.²⁰

Liang Qichao’s conceptualization

Sun Ye-san’s viewpoint of averaging the landownership and nationalizing the land was opposed by Liang Qichao. Based on his conceptualization of social as the overall situation of the country, Liang proposed to develop the ‘national competitiveness (国家竞争)’. He held that it was the nature of human beings to compete to live and survive and that this was true of the nations. In the field of

¹⁸ 凡本国人及外国人之企业，或有独占的性质，或规模过大为私人之力所不能办者，如银行、铁道、航空之属，由国家经营管理之；使私有资本制度不能操纵国民之生计，此则节制资本之要旨也。”《国民党第一次代表大会宣言》

孙中山，“国民党第一次代表大会宣言”，《孙中山选集》1981年版，第593页。Selected Works of Sun Yet-san, p.593.

¹⁹ Sun Yet-san, *Works of Sun Yet-san*, vol.1, p.289.“夫欧美社会之祸，伏之数十年，及今而后见之，又不能使之遽去；吾国治民生主义者，发现最先，睹其祸患于未萌，诚可举政治革命、社会革命，毕其功于一役，还视欧美，彼且瞠乎后也。”《民报发刊辞》，《孙中山全集》第1卷，中华书局1981年版，第289页。

²⁰ Sun Yet-san, *Works of Sun Yet-san*, vol.6, p.249.“中国今日尚用手工业为生产，未入工业革命之第一步。比之欧美，已临其第二工业革命者有殊。故于中国两种革命，必须同时并举，既废手工采机器，又统一而国有之。于斯际，中国正需机器，以营其巨大之农业，以出其丰富之矿业，以建其无数之工厂，以扩张其运输，以发展其公用事业。”《实业计划》孙中山，《孙中山全集》第六卷。北京：中华书局，1985。第249页。

business and economy, to compete was the natural law, and this law applied to people as well as to nations. He wrote, “A nation is the biggest unit for competition, and accordingly the competition is the most severe among nations (一国者，团体之最大圈，而竞争之最高潮也)”.²¹ By advocating this competition Liang hoped that strong capitalists could be brought about in China who could then compete with foreign capitalists and make the nation stronger. Liang also criticized Sun’s socialist viewpoint by saying that nationalizing land was only part of socialism. He believed that “for the whole socialism all the production means should be nationalized. Land is an important production means, and capital is another.”²² He further pointed out that “to do socialism one should first of all nationalize capital then nationalize the land. In one word, socialism requires nationalization of all production means.”²³

Debate over conceptualizations as motor of politics

The different conceptualizations of the concepts of the social and the economic between Sun and Liang grew to a debate in the first few years of the 20th century. We will further discuss this debate by reading an article entitled “Refuting the criticism on Mínsēng Principle” (告非难民生主义者), written by Hu Hanmin (with the penname Min Yi), published in the 12th issue of *Min Bao*, in the envisage to investigate how this debate serves as motor of politics for the 1911 revolution, that is, how they used the concepts to argue for their own political actions.

This article was written to refute Liang’s conceptualization of the socialism in the 14th issue of *Xinmin Congbao*. The article first pointed out that Liang did not know what is economy and socialism by summarizing eight wrong conceptualizations of Liang’s, which are: 1) putting capital at the first and land at the end, 2) taking production as difficult and allocation as easy, 3) sacrificing others to reward the capitalists, 4) excluding foreign capitals, 5) not knowing the origin of the price, 6) not knowing the truth of the low price, 7) not knowing the difference between land rent and land tax, and 8) not knowing the difference between individual economy and social economy. The article then concentrated its retort on Liang’s thoughts against social revolution under three subtitles: 1) refuting the thought of unnecessary for China to carry out social revolution, 2) refuting the thought of impossibility for China to carry out social revolution, and 3) refuting the thought of inability for China to carry out social revolution.

This was one of the many articles in the debate; it was published in March 1907, and put the circulation of *Xinmin Congbao* to an end. From the tenets outlined above, we can see that the author strongly advocated the social revolution which heavily involved the economic solutions to social problems. For example, to refute the thought that was unnecessary for China to carry out social revolution, it wrote that “to

²¹ 梁启超：《新民说·论国家思想》，《饮冰室合集·专集之四》第18页。Liang Qichao, “New discourse of people: on the national thought”, *Works of Liang Qichao*, No4, P.18.

²² 梁启超：杂答某报，《梁启超选集》，北京：燕山出版社，1997。Liang Qichao, “Answers to a Newspaper”, *Selected Works of Liang Qichao* (Beijing: Yanshan Press, 1997).

²³ 梁启超：再驳某报土地国有，新民丛报。Liang Qichao, “A Second Criticism of Nationalization of Land. *Xinmin Congbao*.”

solve social problems we must first solve the issue of land, which include nationalizing the land to avoid it from falling into the hands of a small number of people.”²⁴

Clearly, from their different conceptualizations of the social and the economic Sun Ye-san and Liang Qichao took opposite ways to develop the country. Sun advocated to overthrow the Qing dynasty and to set up the republic. By averaging the landownership Sun attempted to see every farmer have his own land to plant, and this aim could only be accomplished by revolution. To Sun Yet-san, revolution was the only way to realize his Principle of Mínsǎng. Contrary to this, Liang Qichao proposed an evolutionary way to develop his nationalism. He believed that once the revolution occurred the country would suffer and the people would die. What’s more, if there was the revolution, foreign troops would invade. He wrote, “China will not die from being stubborn but from the new party. To fight against the government is a secondary task; instead, to fight against the revolutionary party is the first and foremost. This is a life-and-death fight.”²⁵ He believed in a reform in the Qing Dynasty.

The above quoted article put Liang’s party into mute, and marked the victory of Sun’s party in the debate. How to evaluate the two parties may remain for further research²⁶, but here we are interested in Sun’s success over Liang having a link with the 1911 revolution. As we all know, the 1911 revolution was a success at least in the sense that it overthrew the Qing Dynasty and ended the feudalism in China. To this success Sun’s conceptualization contributed. In terms of the conceptualization of the social as *mínsǎng*, every social problem Sun identified was the result of the dynasty’s poor management of the country. Such a conceptualization of the social was stronger than those of *mínzú*, *shèhuì*, and *qún* so far as action (i.e. revolutionary action) was concerned. Equally, Sun’s conceptualization of the economic strongly involved solutions to the social problems. By joining the revolutionary action, individuals could deprive themselves of poverty. In contrast, Liang’s conceptualization of the social as *mínzú*, though reasonable to some extent,²⁷ seemed to have ignored the then serious tension between Han and Man peoples, and thus was historically considered as reformist rather than revolutionary. These issues were made more explicit in the debate over the conceptualization of the social and the economic and thus can be metaphorically taken as a motor of politics for the 1911 revolution though it may not be a direct cause for it.

Concluding remarks

²⁴ 民意，告非难民生主义者，《民报》，第12号，1907年，第59-60页。Min Yi, “Refuting the criticism on Mínsǎng Principle”, *Min Bao*, March 6, 1907.

²⁵ Ding Wenjiang and Zhao Fengtian, *Biography of Liang Qichao* (Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press, 1983).

²⁶ For almost a whole century it is believed that Sun’s revolution is the right way for China, but recently there are scholars who advocated viewing it from different perspectives. See, for example, Dong Fangkui, Review of the debate over Chinese Social Revolution in the Beginning of the 20th Century. *Journal of Hainan Normal University*, 2001, 4.

²⁷ See, for example, Zhou Zhichu, “Comparison between Sun Yet-san and Liang Qichao’s thoughts about nationalism”, *Journal of East China Shipbuilding Institute* 3 (2001): 1-5.

I have examined the early situations of the Chinese intellectuals and their attempt at turning China into a modern country at the turn to the 20th century. I took Sun Yet-san and Liang Qichao as examples of Chinese intellectuals and discussed their conceptualizations of the social and the economic. This discussion starts from the introduction of the two concepts to China, in which different translations were proposed and multiple meanings were given to each of the translations. I then outlined the differences between Sun and Liang's conceptualizations of the social and the economic. Finally, by discussing the debate between Sun and Liang over the conceptualizations of the social and the economic I argued that the debate served as a motor for the 1911 revolution.

For this argument, I have drawn attention to the difference between Sun's and Liang's conceptualizations. While Sun conceptualized the concept of the social as '*mínshēng* (food, clothing and shelter for everyone)', Liang conceptualized the concept of the social as '*mínzú* (nation as a whole)'. In addition, Sun conceptualized the concept of the economic as 'averaging the landownership and restricting capitals' while Liang conceptualized the concept of the economic as 'national competitiveness'. This difference, as I observed, lies in how the two historical figures envisaged the *status quo* of the Chinese society. The conceptualizations of the social for both Sun and Liang address the social problems in China at the beginning of 20th century, while the conceptualizations of the economic refer to their ways of solving the social problems and their attempts to make China stronger. Terms like *mínshēng*, *mínzú*, though not as popular as *shèhuì*, *qún*, are specific and unique in Sun and Liang's conceptualizations of the social, which is the result of the two historical figures appropriating the Western concept according to their own understandings of the concept, a process in which their understandings were associated with the Chinese situation. This is also true for their conceptualization of the economic, though they both used the term *jīngjì*.

The conceptualizations are not different for their own sake. They are different because Sun Yet-san and Liang Qichao deployed them for politics. By conceptualizing the concept of the social as *mínshēng*, for example, Sun Yet-san listed the vital social problems and aroused a strong sense to fight against the Man people. In fact, such a conceptualization helped Sun advocate a revolution that aimed to overthrow the Qing Dynasty. In contrast, Liang Qichao, by conceptualizing the concept of social as *mínzú*, ignored the tension between the Man and the Han people. What he actually intended to do was a reform within the Qing Dynasty. In this sense, it is not without reason to conclude that the 1911 revolution was a consequence from Sun's victory over Liang in this debate.