



HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

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Summary

The Memory of the National Border in Modern and Contemporary China: China's Imagined Original Territory

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This article explores the memory of China's national border and the revision of national history. The main discourse on the national border in China maintains that the modern border was determined under pressure from foreign powers, and that the border had shrunk from its original size. Such discourses were created in the process of nation-building, thus connecting Chinese nationalism to empire-ness.

The juxtaposition of the real national border and the imagined original border indicate the border's fragileness; while foreign powers are to blame for the shrinking of China's national border, the imagined original border remains along with the movement to recover it. China has now become a strong power that poses as threats toward the surrounding countries partly because of the fluctuating borders, though China peacefully negotiates with these countries for the resolution of territorial disputes.

Chronologically, the virtue of the Chinese emperor has been imagined as unlimited and borderless, with people being separated into two categories: the *Hua* (華 Chinese) and the *Yi* (夷 barbarians). The barbarians were further divided into two groups: those (*Hua* 華 or 化) who received the emperor's virtue and Chinese culture, and those who did not receive them (化外). The Chinese dynasties had their own territories and borders, which often covered all the Middle Kingdom (the region of the *Hua* people 華), including some barbarian regions. The border was sometimes smaller than the Middle Kingdom, and was usually decided by the dynasties together with the surrounding kingdoms. However, the borders were established out of necessity due to reasons such as, for example, the collection of taxes or the management of roads. The borders would never have been defined unless otherwise.

After China reset its national borders under the pressure from Western powers, the Qing Dynasty and Min-kuo were eager to modernize China as a sovereign state and to eliminate the vagueness of the border. China intentionally created a new national history highlighting the loss of national rights and of territory, including the loss of suzerain countries. This narrative cultivated the imagination of the original border of the Qing Dynasty, though they were sometimes decided indefinitely.

After the 1930s, partly because of Japanese aggression and rising Asianism, Chinese scholars carried out historical studies on the formation of its territories in support of national rights, and Chinese intellectuals sometimes imagined wider borders and vast territories. The official discourse denied the revival of Chinese traditional empire which borders were imagined to be more vast by modern Chinese intellectuals, though they had not been decided so clearly.

Where was China? The modern Chinese intellectuals and officials did not have a clear and unified definition. The Constitutionals in the Min-kuo era offered two interpretations; one was real territories, and the other was imagined original territories. After the 1930s, China started to edit official historical maps, followed by scholars arguing about these interpretations. In the 1960s, scholars in the PRC argued that the original Chinese territory was set during the most glorious period of the Qing Dynasty, though the territory and border were not so clear in the eighteenth century.

In the 1990s, the PRC successfully negotiated with neighboring countries and resolved most territorial disputes. Though the political context largely determined China's new border, it was far from a repudiation of the imagined original border. If so, China's border remains fragile.