

Imagining the State: Translated Sovereignty in the First Chinese Translation of a Biography of Washington

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Abstract

In 1886, Li Ruqian 黎汝謙 (1852–1909) and Cai Guozhao 蔡國昭 (dates unknown) translated Washington Irving’s renowned biography of George Washington (1732–1799), which appeared under the title *Huashengdun quanzhuan* 華盛頓全傳 (*A Complete Biography of Washington*). It was the first Chinese translation of a biography about George Washington. The translation proved to be a valuable source of information for Chinese readers in the nineteenth century, as it covered the American Revolutionary War and the founding of the Republic, providing insights into American history and politics.

Through the Li and Cai translation, this paper aims to explore how Chinese intellectuals understood and imagined the nature of a modern state during the late nineteenth century. The analysis will be contextualized through a discussion of sovereignty in the history of the interaction between China and Euro-American countries. As Qing China’s foreign relations differed from the Westphalian system of sovereignty featured by the Western “family of nations,” the concept of sovereignty was understood inconsistently. In their interpretation of Western forms of sovereignty, the Chinese translators employed terms such as *zizhu* 自主 (self-governance), *junzhu* 君主 (absolute monarchy), *minzhu* 民主 (republic), and *yihui* 議會 (parliament), echoing what Henry Wheaton (1785–1848) referred to as “external sovereignty” and “internal sovereignty.” This paper will analyze these terms to uncover changing Chinese perceptions of sovereignty and evaluate their impact on how Chinese intellectuals envisioned a modern state.

The primary approach adopted in this analysis is back translation, which draws on Max Huang's (2008) work and comparative close reading, enabling a nuanced examination of the differences and contingencies in the meanings of concepts between Western and Chinese contexts. Ultimately, this paper will contribute to our understanding of the political landscape as conceptualized by Chinese intellectuals before the peak of Japanese influence in the early twentieth century.

Keywords

translation studies, George Washington, sovereignty,
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1. Introduction: The Modern State and Western Sovereignty

Li Ruqian and Cai Guozhao (referred to as Li and Cai hereafter) were members of Qing China's (1644–1911) delegation to Japan during the 1880s. They were among the early diplomats who resided in foreign countries on a regular basis, thus creating more opportunities for Chinese individuals to interact with Westerners. During their tenure, they translated Washington Irving's renowned biography of George Washington, the first Chinese-language biography of the American president. The Li and Cai translation, which appeared under the title *Huashengdun quanzhuan* 華盛頓全傳, was first published in 1886 by *Zhuyitang* 著易堂, a bookstore in Shanghai. In 1896, the translation was republished serially in *Shiwubao* 時務報 (*The Chinese Progress*), from the first to the eleventh issue (8 August to 15 November 1896). It provided a comprehensive history of the founding of the United States and its political system, making it an invaluable source of information for intellectuals in the nineteenth century aiming to reform China.

Through the translation of the biography of George Washington by Li and Cai, this paper will explore how Chinese intellectuals understood and envisioned the nature of a modern state during the late nineteenth century.¹ The entire analysis will be contextualized through a discussion of sovereignty. In their time, since there was no such concept as *zhuquan* 主權 in the sense of Western sovereignty as we know it today, the Chinese translators employed a range of different terms to interpret this foreign notion. To uncover changing Chinese perceptions of sovereignty and evaluate their impact on how Chinese intellectuals conceptualized a

modern state, we will analyze terms such as *zizhu* 自主 (self-governance), *junzhu* 君主 (absolute monarchy), *minzhu* 民主 (republic), and *yihui* 議會 (parliament) that were used in the Li and Cai translation.

Translation played a crucial role in disseminating Western ideas, knowledge, concepts, and practices, and the process of modernization in China was predominantly influenced by learning from the Euro-American countries (Wong 2017). More than 70 percent of the translated works published between 1861 and 1900 were focused on the natural and applied sciences (Xiong 2013). The 1886 translation of Irving's *The Student's Life of George Washington* was one of the first works in the field of social sciences to be translated (Morioka 2015). Li and Cai's contribution to bringing the American experience of modernity to a Chinese audience cannot be overlooked. Although they were not viewed as playing a leading role in the intellectual transition during this period, their thoughts and ideas reflected the conditions of a larger Chinese group. This translated biography offers a valuable lens through which we can examine the perceptions and conceptions of Chinese intellectuals regarding the nature of a modern state in the late nineteenth century, a time when the dynamics between the states in the "East Asian Family of Nations" differed significantly from those between the Euro-American nations (Hsü 1968, 3–4).

In the Euro-American context, sovereignty has long been associated with the state and is considered one of its primary attributes. Originally, sovereignty was understood to be the idea that there is "a final and absolute authority within the political community" (Hinsley 1986, 1). This idea reflects the notion of a state's absolute and perpetual power over its subjects and territory (Bodin 1992). According to Quentin Skinner (1998, 6–7), "the assertion by a people of their sovereignty," i.e., "the right to be free from any outside control of their political life," first occurred in fourteenth-century Italy. "The desire to establish a degree of power and organization beyond the capacity of lineage and tribal forms" led to the acceptance of the state, and with the state came the "struggle between the principle of community and the principle of dominance" (Hinsley 1986, 15–17). The concept of sovereignty is, therefore, sooner or later unavoidable when a society is ruled by means of the state. In other words, the history of the concept of sovereignty is intimately associated with the nature and origin of the state, as these are mutually constitutive concepts.

Sovereignty is a complex and contested concept, as people interpret it differently. To fully understand this concept, it is essential to historicize

it by examining its various meanings and the entities involved in its exercise throughout history (Howland and White 2009). Without this historical context, any discussion of sovereignty is likely to be incomplete and limited in scope. Otto Gierke (1934, 141) considers that advocates of the theory of the sovereignty of a ruler would agree that “the State, as the ‘Subject’ of supreme authority, was to be identified with the Representative personality of the Ruler,” which “might be either a single or a collective person.” Rule by a single person is what Skinner (1998, 8–9) terms “the sole ruler,” for example, “the supreme ruler at all times over all his subjects everywhere”; such a ruler “retained the power of constituting all magistrates for the administration of justice.” Collective rule is similar to what Skinner calls “popular sovereignty,” whose “efficiency is guaranteed by the fact that the actual running of the city’s affairs is placed in the hands of many administrative experts” (64–65).

It is believed that the concept of sovereignty concerning the absolute power of a nation-state began with the 1648 *Treaty of Westphalia* (Jackson 2003). The “Peace Treaty between the Holy Roman Emperor and the King of France and their respective Allies represented the passing of some power from the emperor to many kings and lords,” establishing “Westphalian sovereignty” (786). Regarding the components of sovereignty, most agree that territory, population, authority, and mutual recognition from other political societies are its four core aspects (Biersteker and Weber 1996). The concept of the equality of nations is associated with the above four elements of sovereignty, as there is no higher power than that of the nation-state, and this became a fundamental principle of the international law employed to deal with relations between equal sovereign nations.

When European countries encountered China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their norms of sovereignty and the universalization of international law confronted and challenged the Chinese conception of the world order (Carrai 2019). The Macartney Embassy, the first British diplomatic mission to China in 1792, was considered a tribute-bearing mission by the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735–1796), as evidenced by the use of different words to describe Great Britain and the Chinese Empire in the Chinese translation (Wong 2009). However, a change in the Chinese conception and practice of sovereignty was inevitable once China was drawn into “the family of nations.” After the Second Opium War of 1856–1860, foreign diplomatic legations gained the right to reside in the

Chinese capital. Furthermore, in the 1870s, the Qing court began sending its missions to foreign countries.

John K. Fairbank and Têng Ssu-yü (1941, 135) have argued that the traditional “Chinese world order” and its “tributary system” dominated China’s engagement with its neighboring countries during the Ming and Qing periods. Under this tributary system, the Chinese considered foreign relations as “giving expression externally to the same principles of social order and political order that were manifested internally within the Chinese state and society. China’s foreign relations were accordingly hierarchic and nonegalitarian, like Chinese society itself” (Fairbank 1968, 2). Though this paradigm proposed by Fairbank and his cohorts does not include all the features of China’s foreign relations, it does convey the most prominent characteristics of China’s way of dealing with “countries from afar.”

Matthew Mosca argues that the Qing court and its officials regarded themselves as facing a set of discrete, localized challenges when crises occurred along China’s borders. When the Qing state was faced with disputes with the Dzungars from the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, it embodied some modern features of state sovereignty because of the way it defended the integrity of the empire’s territorial reach. However, once the Qing court pacified the Dzungar threat and asserted control over the Mongols, its policy returned to a condition similar to the tributary system (Mosca 2013).

In 1689 and 1727, Qing China entered into diplomatic agreements with Russia, which led to the signing of two important treaties, known as the *Treaty of Nerchinsk* and the *Treaty of Kyakhta*, respectively. These treaties were significant because they were established on the principles of equality and reciprocity between both parties. The Qing negotiators demonstrated a departure from the traditional Chinese belief in the superiority of the Middle Kingdom. This change in attitude allowed them to focus on addressing the threat posed by the Dzungars, a significant challenge to the Qing dynasty (Sebes 1961). Despite the concessions made by the Qing negotiators in these treaties, they were not intended to establish a new Chinese attitude towards foreigners (Sebes 1961). The Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661–1722) took measures to avoid drawing domestic attention to the process during the negotiation of the *Treaty of Nerchinsk*, such as sending a delegation outside of the Chinese Empire without any Chinese secretaries and keeping the terms of the treaty from being widely

published. This suggests that the Qing dynasty was still hesitant to engage openly with foreign powers and wanted to maintain the traditional belief in Chinese superiority (Sebes 1961).

Wang Hui's (2008, 687–688) argument about the *Treaty of Nerchinsk* highlights that the concepts of national borders, sovereignty, and international trade were not exclusive to the Western nation-state system during the “Age of Sail.” In his analysis, he observes that while the “tributary system” did not differentiate between China and the rest of the world, Qing foreign relations in practice did acknowledge this distinction, as evidenced by the Sino-Russia treaties (693). This challenges the widely accepted belief that these concepts were exclusively introduced to China through Western influence. In reality, these ideas were already present in Chinese diplomatic negotiations, even before China's encounter with the West. In a similar vein, Song Nianshen (2018, 81) contends that the Kangxi Emperor's actions, while motivated by political expediency, demonstrate that “the Middle Kingdom was capable of adapting to treat another great Eurasian power according to tenets that were not vastly different from modern international law.” Song argues that there is thus no clear delineation between the modern “treaty system” and Qing China's pre-modern “tributary system,” as both shared many commonalities with the principles of international law that were evolving at the time (81).

I concur with Wang Hui's argument that the concept of sovereign rights was not entirely unfamiliar to the traditional “Chinese world order,” as evidenced by the 1689 *Sino-Russian Treaty*. Similarly, Song Nianshen's argument highlights that elements of both the Chinese and Western diplomatic systems were not completely separate and excluded from each other. The consciousness of a national border emerged in China as early as the Song dynasty (960–1279), when the Song court recognized the Liao Empire (916–1125) to its north as a state (Tao 1984; Ge 2011). The century of peace between the Song and Liao dynasties played a pivotal role in the evolution of the structures and norms of traditional Chinese diplomacy. The systematic activities of surveying borders during this period also helped China develop an awareness of equal foreign relations between states, marking a significant milestone in the country's diplomatic history (Tackett 2017).

While the emergence of national borders during the Song dynasty suggests some aspects of sovereignty within the Chinese world order, it is not conclusive evidence of complete compatibility between the

two systems. During the course of the nineteenth century, the “treaty system” did replace China’s “tributary system,” whether as a direct result of Western powers’ hegemony or other factors. As Douglas Howland (1996, 223) has demonstrated, Qing China considered Japan to be within its civilizational sphere, and the new “borders of civilization” were not established until the 1880s.

To what extent did Western notions of sovereignty challenge and reshape traditional Chinese perceptions of sovereignty? The comparison between Washington Irving’s biography of George Washington and its first complete Chinese translation by Li Ruqian and Cai Guozhao provides a useful case study. Since Henry Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law* was widely circulated in late Qing China and significantly influenced Chinese diplomatic practices, we will examine Wheaton’s definition of sovereignty as a foundation for analysis. However, we will not solely analyze the elements of sovereignty but will also focus on the nature of sovereignty.

According to Wheaton (1904, 34), “[S]overeignty is the supreme power by which any State is governed. External sovereignty consists in the independence of one political society, in respect to all other political societies. Internal sovereignty is that which is inherent in the people of any State, or vested in its ruler, by its municipal constitution or fundamental laws.”

During the First Opium War in 1840, Qing China faced threats from the West that continuously challenged its external sovereignty. However, from the perspective of Western countries, it was their inherent right to establish diplomatic relations among sovereign states, and the Qing Empire’s rejection of these efforts was seen as a violation of the norms of international law. As a result of repeated defeats in conflicts with foreign powers, China was compelled to sign a series of unequal treaties, including the *Sino-British Treaty of Nanking* (1842), the *Sino-American Treaty of Wanghia* (1844), the *Treaty of Tientsin* (1858), and the *Sino-Russian Treaty of Aigun* (1858). According to Hou Zhongjun (2012), 112 Sino-Western unequal treaties were signed between 1840 and 1949, under which China was forced to comply with Western rules in its diplomatic affairs. As a consequence, China lost its right to tariff autonomy, faced extraterritoriality in the increasing number of treaty ports, and was obliged to accept the unilateral most-favored-nation principle. These terms generated a sense of humiliation and inferiority among many Chinese intellectuals (Wang 2003).

As China's superiority gradually collapsed when engaging with the Western powers, its encounter with foreign political systems inevitably caught the attention of Chinese officials and intellectuals. As a result, some began to question the legitimacy of China's absolute monarchy. In other words, encountering the West challenged China's internal sovereignty and offered interested Chinese new resources to reconsider the relationship between a sovereign and the people. To analyze the impact of the West on Qing China's concept of sovereignty, we should begin by discussing the external sovereignty that has been continually challenged by Western imperialism since the First Opium War.

2. The Right to Self-Government and External Sovereignty

The early Chinese introductions to George Washington often underscored his resistance to British colonial rule, which was considered a remarkable achievement that, on some register, echoed China's struggle against Western powers in the nineteenth century. This contributed to Washington's prominent status in China and motivated Li Ruqian and Cai Guozhao to translate Irving's biography of him. Li and Cai, with diplomatic experience in Japan, were aware of the growing challenges facing China even before China's loss in the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. As part of the first batch of Chinese diplomats, they interpreted the right to self-government sought by the American people as a way to reimagine a modern state from the perspective of sovereignty, which reflected how Chinese intellectuals were starting to reconceptualize the idea of sovereignty before 1895.

Early Chinese interpretations of American independence by pioneers such as Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857) and Liang Tingnan 梁廷柅 (1796–1861) attributed America's resistance to Britain as a response to exorbitant levies. Even Xu Jiyu 徐繼畲 (1795–1873) (2001), known and praised by Westerners for authoring *Ying huan zhi lie* 瀛寰志略 (*A Short Account of the Maritime Circuit*), regarded the War of Independence as a rebellion. It was not until 1864, when William Alexander Parsons Martin 丁韪良 (1827–1916) and his Chinese students conveyed the view that American independence was a campaign to protect the right to self-government, that the concept of sovereignty began to reach more Chinese intellectuals through their collaborative translation of Wheaton's *Elements of International Law* (Svarverud 2007).

Li and Cai drew upon Martin's work and incorporated his interpretation of the American Revolutionary War into their translation of Washington's biography. To explore their understanding of the American demand for self-government in the pursuit of national independence, it is necessary to compare the 1886 Chinese translation of Washington's biography with its original English version. This analysis illuminates how Li and Cai engaged with the concept of external sovereignty, as presented by Henry Wheaton.

English original: A committee of two from each province reported a series of resolutions, which were adopted and promulgated by Congress, as a "**declaration of colonial rights.**" In this were enumerated their **natural rights to the enjoyment of life, liberty, and property**; and their rights as British subjects. Among the latter was participation in legislative councils. This they could not exercise through representatives in Parliament; they claimed, therefore, the power of legislating in their provincial assemblies; consenting, however, to such acts of Parliament as might be essential to the regulation of trade; but excluding all taxation, internal or external, for raising revenue in America.

The common law of England was claimed as a **birthright**, including the right of **trial by a jury of the vicinage**; of holding public meetings to consider grievances; and of **petitioning the King**. The benefits of all such statutes as existed at the time of the colonization were likewise claimed; together with the immunities and privileges granted by royal charters, or secured by provincial laws.

The maintenance of a standing army in any colony in the time of peace, without the consent of its legislature, was pronounced contrary to law. The exercise of the legislative power in the colonies by a council appointed during pleasure by the crown was declared to be **unconstitutional**, and destructive to the **freedom of American legislation**.² (Irving 1878, 122–123)

Chinese translation: 每邦應設值事二名，通報總議院所定條例。各邦人民古來自有之基業，應享自主之權利，應一如英國人民之舊。今國議院既不許屬地選舉議員、會議政事，則屬地應自設議會，如英國通行之法，同享人民自由之權。國議院所定通商章程，自當遵守，惟徵收亞美利加內外關稅之例，必不可行。審理獄訟，應照舊得請人員陪審，並奏請英君主，予以特恩特情。本邦政治人民聽本邦自行保護，承平時未經議律院議許，不得擅駐常兵。亞美利加操議律之權者，由英君主委任，侵奪亞美利加人民自主之權。(Li and Cai 1886, 2: 29b)

Back translation: Each state shall have two representatives in the parliament to pass the new regulations established by the General Congress onto the colonies. Since our ancestors from Britain settled in these states, we should have **the right to self-government** as the British do. But Congress does not allow us to elect members of the parliament, preventing us from playing a part in Congress. Under this circumstance, we should **establish our Congress to secure the same liberty as the British have**. It is true we are obliged to follow trading regulations set by Congress but not include the extra taxes imposed on us. As to lawsuits, suspects have the right to **trial by jury**, and the colonial court shall **petition the British monarch for this privilege**. In addition, we are under the protection of local states. Without the consent of state legislatures, Britain could not maintain a military presence in times of peace in any colony. The practice that the British emperor be designated the head of the legislative assembly **deprived the American people of self-government**.³

To fully understand Li and Cai's interpretation of the American demand for self-government, we need to examine how they perceived the concepts of *zizhu zhi quan* 自主之權 and *ziyou zhi quan* 自由之權 in their historical context. We find Li and Cai associated these terms with the colonial people's desire to govern themselves and be free from external interventions. They linked "the enjoyment of life, liberty, and freedom" and "freedom of American legislation" with *ziyou* and *zizhu*, respectively, suggesting that the states should be governed by the people who inhabit them.

While it is important to acknowledge the meanings of the terms "*zizhu*" and "*ziyou*" as they were understood in the context of the American Revolutionary War, it is also essential to recognize that the meanings of these terms have evolved over time and in different social contexts. To acquire a deeper understanding of how these terms were used in their contemporary context, we refer to resources like the *English and Chinese Dictionary* edited by Wilhelm Lobscheid (1866–1869).

In his dictionary, Lobscheid (1867, 2: 870; 1868, 3: 1107) defines "liberty" as "freedom from restraint" (*zizhu* 自主; *ziyou* 自由; *zhiji zhi quan* 治己之權; *zicao zhi quan* 自操之權; *zizhu zhi li* 自主之理), and "free" as "being at liberty" (*zizhu* 自主; *ziyou* 自由; *ziji zuo zhu* 自己作主; *you zhiji zhi quan* 有治己之權).⁴ Based on this definition, the terms *zizhu* and *ziyou* adopted by Li and Cai shared the same connotation, namely freedom from British restraint on the colonial states, similar to contemporary usage

regarding the right to self-government. The expression “self-government” does not appear frequently in the English original. However, the term “*zizhu*” appears twenty-five times in the Chinese translation. In the two instances where the term “self-government” appears in the English original, Li and Cai translated it as “*zizhu zhi quan*” and “*zili* 自立” (independent), respectively. These translations align with Lobscheid’s definition of “self-government.”

Examining Li and Cai’s translation, we find they adopted *zizhu* to translate “rights/natural rights/colonial rights” (seven times), “liberty” (seven times), “independent” (five times), “freedom” (twice), and “right of self-government” (once). Traditionally, *zizhu* conveys, on most occasions, the meaning of “to do things in person” (Xu 1937, 47).⁵ In contrast, Li and Cai enriched its usage by defining it as natural rights, liberty, freedom, and the right to self-governance. The semantic change of *zizhu* reflects how Li and Cai viewed America’s independence, revealing their understanding of the essence of the external sovereignty required by the colonial people.

Li and Cai were not the first Chinese intellectuals to use *zizhu* in a modern sense. By examining its usage in nineteenth-century periodicals and newspapers, we observe a noticeable increase. In the early 1830s, there were few uses of this term. Shortly before the First Opium War, in 1839, it was employed twenty-one times, mainly by missionaries in the *Eastern Western Monthly Magazine*, connoting the independence of a state (Gützlauff 1997). However, after the Opium War, the frequency of the term sharply dropped, and it did not become commonly used again until the 1870s, when *Elements of International Law* was translated.⁶

Since then, *zizhu* has become a commonly used term in China, and its usage reached an unprecedented level during the First Sino-Japanese War in the 1890s. For instance, it appeared forty-five times in 1874 and fifty-four times in 1886, but it appeared 246 times in 1895 and 185 times in 1898.⁷ The increased frequency of its use in the 1880s and 1890s led to a shift in its meaning towards state sovereignty. Through their translation of the biography of George Washington, Li and Cai became the pioneering group of Chinese intellectuals to introduce and discuss the concept of sovereignty in relation to America’s independence.

Though Li and Cai grasped the essential plea for America’s independence, they remained constrained in some aspects by Confucian hierarchical relations. In the textual example referred to above, Li and Cai conceived

the role of representatives as passing regulations onto colonial people rather than ensuring their constitutional rights. Similarly, in the Chinese translation, the implementation of trading regulations was compulsory instead of getting people's consent before putting them into legislation. Moreover, trial by jury was viewed as a privilege granted by the British monarch rather than a natural right.

The following is a typical example illustrating how Li and Cai emphasized the moral duty of colonial states to obey the British crown:

English original: They also recommended a **dutiful petition** and remonstrance from the Congress to the king, asserting their **constitutional rights and privileges**; lamenting the necessity of entering into measures that might be displeasing; declaring their attachment to his person, family, and government, and their desire to continue in dependence upon Great Britain; beseeching him not to reduce his faithful subjects of America to desperation, and to reflect that from our sovereign there can be but one appeal. (Irving 1878, 120)

Chinese translation: 請總議會具奏君主，陳訴亞美利加臣民非敢干犯詔令，乃欲保全身家，長為大英臣僕。邇來下民蠢動，抗違諸令，皆出於不得已之情。伏望天恩浩蕩，曲予矜恤，勿令亞美利加忠信之民，無所吁告，則陛下如天之仁，草木咸澤矣。(Li and Cai 1886, 2: 27b, 28a)

Back translation: The colonial states pleaded with Congress to **report to the monarch** that the American subjects would not dare to **violate the royal edicts**. The people **maintained the same loyalty** and natural ties with the empire since they were **keen to be the obedient servant of Britain**. The recent uprisings and **protests by the plebeians** went against the American people's original will and were the last and worst choice. They sincerely hope your excellency could **bestow kindness** and generosity on them and do not disappoint the loyal subjects and leave them with no one to whom they could appeal. They expressed **heartfelt gratitude to the king** and acknowledged that **even the grass and trees benefit from his generosity**.

The English original exposes American ambivalence toward Britain. Yet in the Chinese translation, Li and Cai understood the constitutional rights and privileges as a product of the king's kindness and generosity, and they placed moral restraints on colonial people's resistance to unfair

demands imposed by Britain. In this sense, the colony's attachment to the British Empire was understood in terms of unconditional loyalty to Britain. Terms applied in the Chinese text, including *ju zou* 具奏 (report to the celestial throne), *zhao ling* 詔令 (imperial edict), *chen pu* 臣僕 (obedient servant), *xia min* 下民 (plebeian), *tian en* 天恩 (heavenly kindness), and *bi xia* 陛下 (the emperor), all highlight the superiority of the British monarch while downplaying the constitutional rights of the colonial people.

3. Republic and Internal Sovereignty

After the colonial states gained their independence, restructuring the relationship between the people and the monarch became inevitable, thus prompting debates on the nature of internal sovereignty, namely whether to adopt a republic or a monarchy.

To gain a better understanding of Li and Cai's perceptions of different forms of government, it is important to consider the conflicts that arose among the founding fathers of the United States during the establishment of the Republic. The disagreements between Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), the Secretary of State, and Alexander Hamilton (1757–1804), the Secretary of the Treasury, were among the most significant conflicts during the establishment of the new American government. The main issue at stake was whether the new regime should be organized as a monarchical government, similar to that of Britain, or a democratic republic that distributed power more equally among the states.

Washington's remarks on the future polity serve as an example of how Li and Cai interpreted the American form of government and understood its implications for China. It is therefore crucial to examine how they responded to British monarchical rule within the context of China's imperial order.

English original: The **confederation** appears to me to be **little more than a shadow without the substance**, and **Congress a nugatory body**.... I have ever been a friend to **adequate powers in Congress**, without which it is evident to me we never shall establish a **national character**, or to be considered as on a respectable footing by the powers of Europe. We are either a **united people under one head** and for **federal purposes**, or we are **thirteen independent sovereignties**, eternally counteracting each other.... We have probably had too good an opinion of human nature in forming our **confederation**. Experience has taught us that men will not

adopt and carry into execution measures the best calculated for their own good, without the **intervention of coercive power**. I do not conceive we can exist long as a nation, without lodging, somewhere, a power which will pervade the whole **Union** in as energetic a manner as the authority of the **State governments** extends over the States.... We are apt to run from one extreme to another. I am told that even respectable characters speak of a **monarchial form of government without horror**. From thinking proceeds speaking, thence acting is often but a single step. But how irrevocable and tremendous! What a triumph for our enemies to verify their predications! What a **triumph for the advocates of despotism** to find that we are incapable of governing ourselves, and that systems, founded **on the basis of equal liberty**, are merely ideal and fallacious. (Irving 1878, 635)

Chinese translation: 邇來議會政治，體乾未立，凡事皆掠影浮光。議會無權，則政治之樞機窒塞。吾意各邦政治，必權歸一是，始足與歐洲並駕齊驅。不然，十三邦各自為政，人圖其私，背釁紛爭，無虛日矣。未久人情皆欲利己，罔識大公，使無政府以綱維之，則條教禁令，其何以立。苟不亟建總會總各邦政權，吾恐太平之局，未可永保也。夫一統之治，實非大難，不過於各邦之上，增一總會耳，是何憚而不為？坐使敵人料我不能自治其民，甘受姍笑哉！（Li and Cai 1886, 8: 4b)

Back translation: Recently, there has been a **lack of effective functioning** in our **parliamentary politics**, and everything appears to be **fleeting and superficial**. With **Congress lacking authority**, the pivot of politics becomes obstructed. I suggest that the **thirteen states unite as a federation** to counter the European countries. Otherwise, each state will merely be concerned about individual interests, leading to endless disputes and conflicts. It is common nature for people to calculate for personal good and ignore the interests of others. Without a **centralized government, laws and regulations cannot reach all states**. If we do not establish **Congress** to manage state affairs as soon as possible, the republic may shortly collapse. In my opinion, a **centralized government is not the horror** that people think it is, and we only need to set up a **Congress** above the states. **I do not understand why people are afraid of Congress**. Our enemies will laugh at us if it turns out that we cannot **govern state affairs independently**.

In the Chinese translation, Li and Cai grasped the significance of Congress maintaining the federation to preserve national independence.

Whereas Washington's concern about the threat of despotism disappeared in their interpretation, the translators emphasized that a centralized government was not as terrible as some had feared. In the English original, the intervention of coercive power imposed by the federal government was to secure the nation's independence and ensure the public interest. In contrast, the Chinese interpretation highlights the government's role in enforcing laws and regulations.

Li and Cai used the term *yitong zhi zhi* 一統之治, literally meaning "centralized government," to describe the new political system proposed by Washington. This term implied a unified government that would have the power to maintain order and control over a large territory. How did Li and Cai perceive the proposed "centralized government" and why did they not consider it a disaster? Did they differentiate this system from the political institutions of imperial China? What were their opinions on the British monarchical government? To address these questions, we must delve into the translators' comprehension of the American debates regarding the two types of governance. The following excerpt presents Jefferson's critique of a monarchical government in his own words and compares his perspective with that of Hamilton:

English original: Being fresh from the **French Revolution**, while in its first and pure stage, and, consequently, somewhat whetted up in my own **republican principles**, I found a state of things in the general society of the place, which I could not have supposed possible. The revolution I had left, and that we had just gone through in the recent change of our own government, being the common topics of conversation, I was astonished to find the **general prevalence of monarchical sentiments**, insomuch, that in **maintaining those of republicanism**, I had always the whole company on my hands, never scarcely finding among them a single co-advocate in that argument, unless some old member of Congress happened to be present. The furthest that anyone would go **in support of the republican features** of our new government, would be to say, "the present constitution is well as a beginning and may be allowed a fair trial, but it is, in fact, only a stepping stone to something better."...

Alexander Hamilton, though pledged and sincerely disposed to support the **republican form**, with regard to our country, preferred theoretically, a **monarchical form**; and, being frank of speech, and as Gouverneur Morris writes, "prone to mount his hobby," may have spoken openly in favor of that form as suitable to France; and as his admirers took their creed from him, opinions of the kind may have been uttered

pretty freely at dinner-tables. These, however, which so much surprised and shocked Mr. Jefferson, were probably merely speculative opinions, broached in unguarded hours, with no sinister design, by men who had no thought of **paving the way for a monarchy**. (Irving 1878, 654–655)

Chinese translation: 我當法國變亂時，曾留心省查推求民治之法，今觀我邦風俗人心，恐難持久。吾邦此番變亂，政治更新，正為主持民政，何上下民心，又歸於一王之法？廷臣中除議會舊員外，竟無一人出而抗辯，殊可詫異。其挾持一切民主政之人，或雲目下政治初基，可暫試辦。窺其意，實欲漸成君主之治，希望厚祿高爵耳。堪美兒頓雖極力扶持民主，而展布皆效權歸一主之法。如哥分拿摩利示所批，欲乘其木馬之意，平時常明稱仰慕法國民主政治，陰使左右贊善之人，述其函中之意，當廷將論。而已故作驚訝之狀，以掩其跡。從此遮化臣懷疑益甚，樹植私黨，目堪美兒頓為首倡權歸一主之黨矣。(Li and Cai 1886, 8: 15b, 16a)

Back translation: When I was in France, I happened to experience the **French Rebellion**, through which I closely investigated the **republic form of government**. Considering the customs and traditions of our nation, I doubt whether our **federation** can stand long. Recently, we went through an uprising, and political reform is underway. I think it is **a good time to consolidate the republican system**, but why do so many people abruptly show a preference for **monarchical government**? Except for a few senior members of the parliament, **none resisted the monarchy**. Even those who supported **a republic** believe **the monarchical form of government** is worth a try. But in my view, they aim to establish **a monarchical government** and desire to gain higher-ranked positions and more salaries from the government.

Though Hamilton supports **a republican regime**, what he has done so far follows the **monarchial principle**. Gouverneur [Morris] reflected that Hamilton pretended to endorse the **republic**, but he favored **monarchy**. Hamilton expressed **insincere approval of the French republic** and developed a faction disapproving of the **republic** in private. Hamilton pretended he did not know the **unfavorable views of the republican system** but intentionally brought them into the discussion when meeting with Washington. After that, Jefferson doubted Hamilton's political stance and regarded him as the leading figure who advocated the monarchial form of government.

Li and Cai translated “republican principle” as “*mizhi zhi fa* 民治之法,” which means “to rule the state by the people,” while “republicanism” was rendered as “*minzheng* 民政” or “*minzhu zheng* 民主政,” which are different variants of “*minzhu* 民主” (Chen 2019, 326–327). On the other hand, the translators used “*junzhu zhi zhi* 君主之治” to convey “monarchial,” which means “to rule the state by the monarchy,” “*yi wang zhi fa* 一王之法” for “principles of monarchy,” and “*quan gui yi zhu* 權歸一主” for “monarchial government” (Masini 1993, 144). Since the usage of *minzhu* and *junzhu* in the nineteenth century was different from their contemporary meaning, it is crucial to explore how Li and Cai interpreted these terms in the Chinese translation.

The preceding example confirms that *minzhu* was associated with the republic and *junzhu* with a monarchy, and they were perceived as opposing concepts. To ascertain Li and Cai’s understanding of these concepts, let us examine the corresponding translated terms and their frequency of use in the Chinese translation.

From Table 1, we observe diverse translations for the term “monarchy,” equating *junzhu* with “*yi wang* 一王” (an absolute ruler), where we confirm that Li and Cai used *junzhu* in the traditional sense. Collocations of *junzhu* in the Chinese translation further support this argument. They include “*quanli guo zhong* 權利過重” (excessively unrestricted power), “*te en te quan* 特恩特權” (privileges and rights), “*xi nu wei duan* 喜怒爲斷” (to judge a lawsuit according to the king’s preference), “*weiren* 委任” (appoint legislators and judges), “*kaibi Guoyiyuan* 開閉國議院” (convene and dismiss Congress), “*gechu Guoyiyuan xin zhang* 革除國議院新章” (abolish charters established by Congress) (Li and Cai 1886, 2: 15b, 18b, 19a, 20a, 29b). All these collocations indicate that *junzhu*, the monarchy, has unlimited authority.

Table 1. Chinese Translations of Words Relating to “Monarchy”

Chinese translation English term	君主 <i>Junzhu</i>	一王之治 <i>Yi wang zhi zhi</i>	一王之法 <i>Yi wang zhi fa</i>	一王之制 <i>Yi wang zhi zhi</i>	權歸一主 <i>Quan gui yi zhu</i>	王權 <i>Wang quan</i>
Monarchy	1	1	2			
Monarchial	2	1	1		1	
Monarchist				1		1
Royal	2					1
Regal					1	
Frequency	5	2	3	1	2	2

Table 2. Chinese Translations of Words Relating to “Republic”

Chinese translation English term	民主 <i>Minzhu</i>	民政 <i>Minzheng</i>	民治 <i>Minzhi</i>	民主政 <i>Minzhu zheng</i>
Republic	3			2
Republican	4	2	1	1
Republicanism	1	1		
Frequency	8	3	1	3

Table 2 demonstrates that, in addition to *minzhu*, translated terms of republic include *minzheng*, *minzhi* and *minzhu zheng*. The following example helps to clarify how Li and Cai perceived *minzhu*:

English original: He [Genet] was aware of the grateful feelings of the nation to France; of the popular disposition to go all lengths, short of war, in her favor; of the popular idea that **republican interests were identical** on both sides of the Atlantic; that **a royal triumph over republicanism** in Europe would be followed by **a combination to destroy it in this country**. (Irving 1878, 679)

Chinese translation: 毡列審知合衆邦人心深感法國。法國今改爲民主，與合衆邦民主如同一家，若法國民主傾覆，復立君主，則合衆邦民主政亦必墮壞。(Li and Cai 1886, 8: 29a)

Back translation: Genet knows the Americans feel grateful to France. **America has been in the same boat as France** because they are both **republics**. If **republican France** were to be subverted into a **monarchy**, the chances of America maintaining its **republican system** would be greatly diminished.

Li and Cai used the term “*minzhu*” here to denote “a state ruled by the people,” deviating from its traditional meaning of “chief of the people” in the Chinese context. In addition, they clearly indicate their approval of the republic, arguing that America should offer a helping hand to France to prevent it from being subverted into a monarchy.

In the Chinese translation, *junzhu* was consistently used to refer to Britain, while *minzhu* was associated with America. Additionally, “*chao ting* 朝廷” (imperial court) was used eighteen times in association with Britain, while “*zhengfu* 政府” (government) was predominantly used in relation to America, occurring twenty-nine times. This linguistic evidence

from the Chinese translation suggests that Li and Cai clearly differentiated between the political systems of Britain and America.

When reviewing the role played by the British monarch in the colonial states, Li and Cai (1886, 2: 18b, 29b) held that the monarch placed too many restraints on America (“*fa gang tai fan* 法綱太煩”), suppressed the colonial people’s constitutional rights (“*qian shu Yazhou ren min* 鉗束亞洲人民”), and deprived them of their right to liberty and self-government (“*qinduo Yameilijia zizhu zhi quan* 侵奪亞美利加自主之權”). To a large degree, Li and Cai regarded Britain’s constitutional monarchy as being the same as imperial China’s absolute monarchy. This reflects the fact that, in the nineteenth century, most Chinese intellectuals did not understand that the existence of a monarchical system did not determine whether the state was democratic or despotic (Jiang 2010).⁸ It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that Liang Qichao (2018) popularized the distinctions within monarchical polities. This was the context for Li and Cai’s support for the preservation of republican institutions in America while belittling Britain’s monarchical system.

4. The Parliamentary System and Internal Sovereignty

A representative government is indispensable for transforming an absolute monarchical form of government into a constitutional polity or republic. While Li and Cai mistakenly equated Britain’s monarchy with China’s imperial autocracy, they did not overlook the presence of the British Parliament in their interpretations. Following the establishment of the Republic, the parliamentary system played a vital role in America as well. For this reason, “*yihui* 議會” (parliament) became one of the most frequently used terms in the Chinese translation of Irving’s biography of George Washington. Considering the lack of an institution similar to the parliamentary system in China’s autocratic imperial system, it is worthwhile exploring Li and Cai’s perception of this political structure and assessing the extent to which their translation facilitated the dissemination of knowledge about the role of parliament in the American Republic.⁹ Additionally, it is important to evaluate how this knowledge influenced China’s reform movement in the 1890s.

The initial understanding of parliamentary systems among the Chinese provides valuable perspectives on their acquisition of knowledge regarding foreign political systems. While prior awareness of their existence did emerge, it was not until the 1870s, when the Qing court dispatched diplomatic missions overseas, that Chinese diplomats first

acknowledged the significance of parliamentary institutions, primarily to cultivate a harmonious relationship between the people and the monarch. However, few noticed the differences between democratic countries and their respective features. In the 1880s and early 1890s, those who made distinctions between political systems in Britain and America favored the British monarchy, as they believed that America placed too much emphasis on popular opinion, which influenced the proposals developed during the 1898 Reform Movement.¹⁰ This raises the question: why did the Chinese perceive the American model as overemphasizing popular rights and disrupting the balance between the subjects and the emperor? Li and Cai’s translation provides an opportunity to explore Chinese knowledge of the specific features of American-style democracy before the 1898 Reform Movement.

In Irving’s English original, words relating to the parliamentary system include “Assembly,” “Congress,” “Council,” “the House,” “House of the Burgesses,” “House of the Representative,” “Legislature,” “Parliament,” and “Senate.” Among them, “Assembly,” “House of the Burgesses,” and “Parliament” were used during the period before American independence. In contrast, terms like “House of the Representative” and “Senate” were associated with the American Republic established after the revolution. Table 3 displays the translated terms regarding parliament in Li and Cai’s translation.

Table 3. The Frequency of Terms Relating to “Parliament”¹¹

English	Translation	Frequency	English	Translation	Frequency
Assembly	議會	12	Council	會議/大會	9
	公會	5		議會	4
	民會	1		會堂	4
	議院	1		紳議院	1
	會議	1		議院	1
	議員	1		樞密院	1
Congress				內閣	1
	議會	22	Legislature	議院	6
	總議會	15		議律院	5
	總議院	10		議會	4
	議院	10		政府	2
	總會	4		立法總部	1
	議員	3			
	兩院	2			
	會議	2			
	公會	2			
	紳議院	1			
	民議院	1			

English	Translation	Frequency	English	Translation	Frequency
The House	上院	3	Parliament	國議院	14
	議會	2		議院	4
	民會	1		議律院	1
	上議院	1		議政院	1
	議院	1		民議院	1
				總議會	1
Two Houses	上下院	1	Senate	上議院	2
				下議院	2
				紳議院	1
				下院	1
				議院	1
The House of Burgesses	民議院	9	House of Representatives	下議院	2
	議員	1		議員	2
	民會	1		民議院	1
	民議會	1		上議院	1
				議會	1
Houses of Parliament	上下國議院	1			

Table 3 reveals that *yihui* 議會 and *yi yuan* 議院 are the two most frequently used Chinese renderings for words related to parliament. Further, Li and Cai classified *yi yuan* into “*shang yi yuan* 上議院” (Upper House) and “*xia yi yuan* 下議院” (Lower House), “*shen yiyuan* 紳議院” (Gentry House) and “*min yiyuan* 民議院” (The House of Burgesses), and “*zong yiyuan* 總議院” (Congress) and “*guo yiyuan* 國議院” (Parliament). It is worth noting that Li and Cai adopted different Chinese terms to record the parliamentary systems depending on the conditions in America, as is indicated in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1. Chinese Translations of Parliamentary Structures

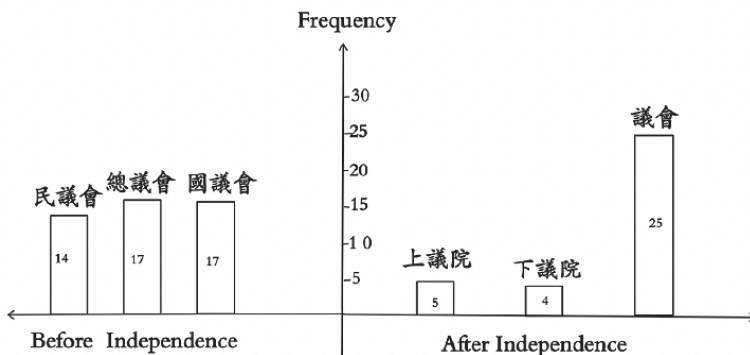


Chart 1 illustrates that prior to American independence, the parliamentary system had various ranks representing different levels of political hierarchy. However, after achieving autonomy, the old class system dissolved, indicating that Li and Cai recognized the transformation in the nature of parliament. They were also cognizant of the distinctions in the parliamentary systems between the United States and Britain. Nonetheless, it remains unclear how they comprehended the particular roles of parliament.

5. Roles of the Parliament in the Li and Cai's Interpretation

As mentioned earlier, the concept of a parliament was not well established in the first half of the nineteenth century, which makes it intriguing to explore how Li and Cai perceived this foreign institution (Zhang 2013). To gain a deeper perspective, we begin by examining their views on the taxation rights of the British parliament and the colonial assembly.

English original: Spirited resolutions were passed, **denouncing the recent act of Parliament imposing taxes; the power** to do which, on the inhabitants of this colony, “**was legally and constitutionally vested in the House of Burgesses....**” Copies of these resolutions were ordered to be **forwarded by the speaker to the Legislatures of the other colonies, with a request for their concurrence.** (Irving 1878, 108–109)

Chinese translation: 每日開院，各員放言高論，極陳徵收賦稅，向例由民議院議定。無未經民議院定議，而朝廷遽直行之例。(Li and Cai 1886, 2: 20b)

Back translation: The members argued that **the right of** taxation lies in the **House of Burgesses. Without its permission, the British court has no authority to implement a new tax act.**

Li and Cai recognized that the representatives of Britain lacked the authority to impose taxes on Americans without the consent of the House of Burgesses. In their translation, they emphasized the authority of the “*minyiyuan* 民議院” in imposing taxation. Furthermore, drawing upon the autonomous taxation right, the Chinese translators also deduced that Britain lacked the authority to deploy resident troops to America without the authorization of the Assembly.

English original: The **Assembly**, after ample discussion of past grievances, resolved, that **the establishment of a standing army in the colony in a time of peace was an invasion of natural rights**; that a standing army was **not known as a part of the British constitution**, and that the sending an armed force to aid the civil authority was unprecedented, and highly **dangerous to the people**. (Irving 1878, 110)

Chinese translation: 議會謂當此太平之日，無故駐兵防守，實有礙犯人民自主之權，且亦非英國舊制，特以助文官之威，於生民毫無補益。
(Li and Cai 1886, 2: 21b)

Back translation: The **assembly** claimed that **Britain had no right to station troops** in colonial states in a time of peace because it violated **people's right to self-government**. In addition, it went against **Britain's established regulations**, and by doing so, it merely assisted the civil authority and **did not benefit the colony**.

In addition, Li and Cai acknowledged the pivotal role of the parliament in the establishment of the American constitution, the election of the President, the approval of bills, and the appointment of ministers, following the country's independence. An example showcasing their comprehension of the Constitution's formation by Congress is as follows:

English original: It was not until the 25th of May that a sufficient number of **delegates** were assembled to form a quorum, when they proceeded to organize the body, and by a unanimous vote Washington was called up to the chair as **President**... every point was the subject of able and scrupulous discussion by the best talent and noblest spirits of the country. Washington felt restrained by his situation as President from taking a part in the debates, but his well-known opinions influenced the whole. The result was the formation of **the constitution** of the United States, which (with some amendments made in after years) still exists.

The constitution thus formed was forwarded to **Congress**, and thence transmitted to the **State Legislatures**, each of which submitted it to a **State convention**, composed of **delegates** chosen for that express purpose by the people. **The ratification of the instrument by nine States was necessary to carry it into effect**, and as the several **State conventions** would assemble at different times, nearly a year must elapse **before the decisions of the requisite number could be obtained**. (Irving 1878, 638)

Chinese translation: 至五月廿五日，會員畢到，公舉華盛頓為主席……每議一事情，才俊之士，各抒己見。華盛頓必折衷至當而後定，人皆稱善，著為令典。後雖逐年小有增損，然皆以是會定律為準繩也。其國例匯成冊卷，移下各邦立法會，議定施行，須九邦允准，乃為成例。各邦會期不一，至一年而始定。(Li and Cai 1886, 8: 6a–6b)

Back translation: On May 25th, most **representatives** arrived, and they elected Washington as the **chairman of Congress**. Talented people expressed their opinions on each item on the agenda. Washington **listened to every single suggestion and balanced the interests of each state**. Only with unanimous consensus could it become the **federal constitution**. There might have been minor revisions of the charter afterwards, but it formed the rule of managing and evaluating state affairs. After the meeting, the committee forwarded the draft to **local legislatures**. With **collective consent**, it became the confirmed and **formal constitution**. It took a year to reach a shared agreement on the draft because the meeting dates vary from state to state.

Li and Cai's translation highlights three remarkable features of Congress. Firstly, the Chairperson is elected by representatives from different states, emphasizing the importance of representation and the decentralized nature of power in the United States. Secondly, the Chair does not have absolute authority during a convention, but rather must consider and value the suggestions proposed by delegates to reach an agreement, indicating a cooperative decision-making process. Thirdly, Congress does not have the final say in confirming the constitution, but rather needs shared support from the majority of states to be converted into law, demonstrating a system of checks and balances and a decentralized distribution of power. These three features of the American political system contrasted sharply with the absolute authority of the emperor in China.

In addition to its role in constitution-making, Congress played a crucial role in electing the President through the Electoral College system. The Electors, who are appointed by each state, vote for the President and Vice President, and their votes are then counted and certified by Congress. This process ensures that the President is elected through a representative system that reflects the will of the people as expressed through state-level voting.

English original: Testimonials of ratification having been received by **Congress from a sufficient number of States**, an act was passed by that body on the 13th of September, appointing the first Wednesday in January, 1789, for the people of the United States to **choose electors of a President according to the constitution**, and the first Wednesday in the month of February following for the electors to meet and make a choice.... The election took place at the appointed time, and it was soon ascertained that Washington was chosen President for the **term of four years** from the 4th of March. (Irving 1878, 638–639)

Chinese translation: 總議會收齊各邦允據，九月十三日，乃定於一千七百八十九年正月第一禮拜三日，**推選選舉總統會員**。二月第一禮拜三日，各員會議，定於三月第一禮拜，在紐約**推舉總統**……已而各員會議，竟舉華盛頓為總統，以三四月受事，**四年為限**。(Li and Cai 1886, 8: 6b–7a)

Back translation: Having **received consent from all the states** on the 13th day in September, **Congress** decided that the first Wednesday in January 1789 was the date to elect members of the **Electoral College**. On the first Wednesday in February, the Members agreed to meet on the first day of March to hold the **Presidential election** in New York. **The Electoral College** appointed Washington the President of the United States after the session and announced the **four-year term of the presidency** would start in March.

Li and Cai's translation emphasizes that Congress needed the House of Representatives' approval to elect members of the Electoral College, who would then decide who the President would be. Additionally, they highlighted that unlike China's system of hereditary succession, the presidency had a four-year term limit. While appointing a ruler and implementing term limits were relatively new practices for the Chinese, the translators clearly recognized the importance of Congress's role in the American government. However, their translation suggests a misunderstanding of the nature of representative government. In the English original, "choosing electors of a President" is a constitutional principle, but the translators shifted this responsibility to Congress and the House of Representatives. This implies that Li and Cai may have overlooked the fact that the authority to elect the President ultimately derives from the Constitution and not solely from Congress or the House of Representatives.

While the concept of a parliament was not entirely new to Chinese intellectuals, parliamentary institutions were relatively novel in the Chinese context during the nineteenth century. The following is an example showing how Li and Cai introduced and understood the election of delegates.

English original: The **constitution** had provided that the **number of representatives should not exceed one for every thirty thousand persons**, and the **House of Representatives** passed a bill **allotting to each State one member for this amount of population**. This would **leave a fraction**, greater or less, in each State. Its operation was **unequal**, as in some States a large surplus would be **unrepresented**, and hence, in one branch of the **legislature**, the relative power of the State be affected. That, too, was the popular branch, which those who feared a strong executive, desired to provide with **the counterpoise of as full a representation as possible**.

To obviate this difficulty, the **Senate** adopted a new principle of appointment. They assumed the total population of the United States, and not the population of each State, as the basis on which the whole **number of representatives** should be ascertained. This aggregate they divided by thirty thousand: the quotient gave one hundred and twenty as the number of representatives; and this number they apportioned upon the several States according to their population; allotting to each one member for every thirty thousand, and distributing the residuary members (to make up the one hundred and twenty) among the States having the largest fractions.

After an earnest debate, **the House concurred**, and the bill came before the President for his decision. **The sole question was as to its constitutionality**; that being admitted, it was unexceptionable.... After **weighing the arguments on both sides**, and maturely deliberating, the President made up his mind that **the act was unconstitutional**.... He accordingly returned the bill with his objections, being **the first exercise of the veto power**. A new bill was substituted, and passed into a **law**; giving a representative for every thirty-three thousand to each State. (Irving 1878, 666–667)

Chinese translation: 先是各邦選舉下院議員，定例三萬人始舉一人。此時下議院以各邦大小不一，必三萬人舉一人，則小邦之不滿三萬人者，即不得舉議員。將來事權偏重，必有強行抑勒之弊。下議院議定新章，統合眾邦全國人民，均算三萬人舉一人，應舉會員百二十名，除人數繁盛之邦，仍依三萬人一員之例選舉外，其餘畸零之數，准與

各小邦均匀合計，足三萬人，即准舉議員一人。以昭平允，而杜強凌之弊。上議院議准，呈請總統決奪……華盛頓權其可否，亦以不合國制批駁，此華盛頓第一次操興廢之權也。已復更定新章，每邦以三萬三千人，乃准舉會員一人。(Li and Cai 1886, 8: 22a–22b)

Back translation: Firstly, it was the election of the **House of Representatives**, and each state **selects one member out of every thirty thousand people according to the regulation**. The House of Representatives noted that as the population varies from state to state, if a state can only choose one delegate out of thirty thousand people, the states whose population was less than a quorum would be unable to select members. In this case, the powers entrusted to different administrative districts would **be out of balance because states with a larger population would overwhelm those with a smaller population**.

Therefore, **the House** agreed to renew the regulation, taking the total population of the United States rather than that of each state as a base. With this aggregate dividing thirty thousand, they concluded that the number of representatives should be one hundred and twenty. In states with large populations, the electing method remained the same. The small ones could merge with other states to reach the minimum population requirement and select their representatives. By doing so, it would **balance** the powers and duties of each state, regardless of the size of its population.

The House approved the bill and forwarded it to the President for making a decision. After balancing the advantages and disadvantages, Washington vetoed the bill because he thought **it violated the constitution**. It was the first time Washington **exercised his power to refuse a draft bill**. The confirmed regulation stipulates that each state would elect one representative out of every thirty-three thousand people.

There are a few points worth noting in the Chinese translation. Firstly, Li and Cai underestimated the role of the constitution in determining the number of representatives and failed to acknowledge that the constitutionality of a bill is the only criterion for evaluation. As a result, they omitted the statement, “[T]he sole question was as to its constitutionality; that being admitted, it was unexceptionable” in their translation. Moreover, they also confused the House of Representatives with the Senate and conflated them in some instances. In Chinese culture, the concept of “*shang* 上” (above) is considered superior to “*xia* 下” (below). They assumed that the Senate (*shang yiyuan* 上議院) had more authority than the House (*xia yiyuan* 下議院).

Despite the misinterpretations in the Chinese translation, Li and Cai's contribution to disseminating knowledge about the election of representatives cannot be denied. Firstly, they emphasized the importance of improving the election process to prevent power imbalances caused by the varying sizes of states. Secondly, they underscored the significance of ensuring full representation for each state. Lastly, they provided a practical example of how members of a representative body could be selected, which was a valuable introduction to Chinese audiences. This example could be a potential guide to China's future practices at the time.

Li and Cai's (1886) translation also highlighted the crucial roles played by the House of Representatives and the Senate, such as signing treaties with foreign countries, granting certain executive powers to the President during emergencies, and approving or rejecting bills. Some of the powers held by the parliament even overlapped with those of the President, exceeding what many in China would have expected. This reveals why a significant number of Chinese intellectuals perceived the American model as conferring too much authority on the public. Wang Tao's (2010, 86) perspective was representative of this sentiment when he stated that "in a state ruled by the people, laws and regulations are constantly changing, making it difficult to have a firm resolution. This type of system can lead to corrupt practices."

6. Conclusion

Li Ruqian and Cai Guozhao, as members of China's first group of diplomats to visit and reside in foreign countries, played a crucial role in introducing political knowledge of Euro-American countries to China. Their translation of Irving's biography of George Washington was instrumental in spreading information about the American Republic and introducing Chinese intellectuals to new political concepts.

While their translation was not the sole source of knowledge available to reformists and interested readers, it served as a significant resource that helped explain why many reformists believed China was not yet ready to transition to a republic. Liang Qichao (2018) noted that if China had tried to make a direct transition from an absolute monarchy to a democratic republic like the United States, it would have faced significant resistance from conservatives, thus making it difficult to achieve the desired outcome.

Through their interpretation of sovereignty presented in the biography of George Washington, Li and Cai offered valuable insights into the

construction of a modern state that was distinct from the prevailing imperial order of their time. Their translation introduced and solidified knowledge about self-government and parliamentary systems, which challenged Chinese perceptions of sovereignty. In terms of external sovereignty, they acknowledged the importance of the right to self-government, though their emphasis on the moral obligation of colonial states to the British crown also reflected imperial ideologies.

Regarding internal sovereignty, Li and Cai distinguished the American Republic from Britain's monarchical rule. However, they considered Britain's constitutional monarchy to be the same as Qing China's absolute monarchy. Through their interpretation of the nature and roles of the parliament, they further elaborated on the substance of the internal sovereignty of the American Republic. Their effort was not practically fruitful in the reform movements of the 1890s, but it explains why the reformists did not choose the American model. The rejection of a republican model in the 1898 Reform Movement demonstrated their contribution to circulating knowledge of popular participation in decision-making in the American Republic. Although the "imagined state" conceived in their translated sovereignty was not yet realized in the practical reforms of the late nineteenth century, their work was crucial in providing a foundation for future reform efforts.

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Notes

- 1 The major work on the importance of George Washington is that of Pan Guangzhe 潘光哲. However, Pan's focus is more on the mythologizing of Washington, how his image was created, and how Chinese intellectuals and political figures utilized him. Furthermore, Pan's approach revolves around reception history and political culture, whereas I emphasize conceptual history and underscore what we can learn from a precise reading of the first translated biography of Washington. See Pan (2020).

- 2 Unless noted otherwise, material in bold indicates the author's highlight.
- 3 Unless otherwise noted, the translation is the author's own.
- 4 The English-Chinese Dictionary database (英華字典資料庫) developed by the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, is of great assistance in this regard. For more, see: <https://mhdb.mh.sinica.edu.tw/dictionary/>.
- 5 For instance, "The Son of Heaven does not host his daughter's wedding. Instead, the dukes of princes supervise it, i.e., *gongzhu* 公主. But the princes are in charge of their daughters' weddings, and thus their daughters are *weng zhu* 翁主" (天子不親主婚，故謂之公主。諸王即自主婚，故其女為翁主). See Xu (1937).
- 6 *Shanghai xinbao* 上海新報, no. 383 (26 July 1870), no. 386 (2 August 1870), no. 389 (9 August 1870), no. 392 (16 August 1870), no. 395 (23 August 1870), no. 398 (30 August 1870), no. 401 (6 September 1870), no. 404 (13 September 1870), no. 407 (20 September 1870), no. 410 (27 September 1870), no. 413 (4 October 1870), no. 416 (11 October 1870), no. 419 (18 October 1870), no. 422 (25 October 1870), no. 425 (1 November 1870), and no. 428 (8 November 1870). It issued *Wanguo gongfa* 萬國公法, and there were many uses in the chapter "Lun wanguo zizhi yu zizhu zhi quan 論萬國自治與自主之權" (sovereign states) and the chapter "Lun zhuguo zihuo zizhu zhi quan 論諸國自獲自主之權" (right of self-preservation).
- 7 Data is from *Hantang jindai baokan shujuk* 瀚堂近代報刊數據庫 (Hytung Chinese modern periodicals database) (n.d.), containing thousands of magazines and newspapers printed in China from 1792 to 1949.
- 8 Jiang Dunfu was one of the exceptions. In a preface to *Da Yingguo zhi* 大英國志 (*History of England*), he introduced three types of political systems: *yi jun wei zheng* 一君為政 (ruled by one ruler), *yi min wei zheng* 一民為政 (ruled by the people), and *jun min gong zheng* 君民共政 (ruled by one ruler and the people). It is probable that Li and Cai did not read Jiang's essay. By highlighting the similarities between China and England, the intention was to emphasize the need for reform in China, as the two Chinese translators expressed their preference for the American Republic in contrast to Britain's monarchy. However, their attitude toward the republican system changed over time. In the 1890s, Li Ruqian staunchly supported Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, who believed that China was not adequately prepared for a republic. For Kang and Liang's solution to China's difficulties, see Chang (1971, 106); Kang Youwei, "Kongzi gaizhi kao 孔子改制攷" (Confucius as a reformer) in Kang (2007, 3: 3).

- 9 It is necessary to clarify that the existence of the concepts of “parliament” and “congress” in late Qing China was not solely introduced through the Li and Cai translation. These concepts were already being discussed in the late 1850s in works such as *Liuhe congshan* 六合叢談 edited by Alexander Wylie, as well as in the writings of Wang Tao 王韜 and Zhang Deyi 張德彝, among others. For relevant discussion, please refer to Zhang Pengyuan’s “Yihui sixiang zhi jinru Zhongguo 議會思想之進入中國” (The introduction of parliamentary ideology to China) in Zhang (2013, 1–48).
- 10 For instance, Wang showed his preference for the British model, arguing that “the daily domestic political life of England actually embodies the traditional ideals of our ancient Golden Age [lit., the Three Dynasties and earlier].” See Wang’s essay “Ji Yingguo zhengzhi 紀英國政治” (Politics in Britain) in Wang (2010, 127). For the English translation, see Fairbank and Têng (1963, 139–140).
- 11 The frequency of the Chinese-translated terms and the terms in the English original is different because there are cases of abridged translations.

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