

## Book Review

Convergence and continuation of geopolitical movements worldwide. [Review of the book *Birth of the geopolitical age: Global frontiers and the making of modern China*, by Shellen Xiao Wu]. California, America, Stanford University Press, 2023, 309 pp. ISBN: Hardcover ISBN: 9781503636415; Paperback ISBN: 9781503636842; Ebook ISBN: 9781503636859

**Peigen Xia\***

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Intertwined with politics, geography has impacted global academia as the empires transformed into nation states and modern states since the nineteenth century. The development and expansion of borderlands and frontiers not only delineated the changeable geographical outline of a particular state but also revealed the process of a state pursuing sovereignty and natural resources in the modern era, which shows a continuation between imperial and modern patterns. In her book, Shellen Wu depicts and reflects on a fascinating history of the continuation of China's narratives from an empire to a modern state. In this story, the modern Chinese state successfully retained its territorial expanse after the fall of the Qing Empire. From Wu's perspective, the reason for modern China's emergence and long-time existence should be placed in a global geo-modernity context to explore. Geo-modernity, she suggests, is the soil breeding the modern geographical concern related to unambiguously delineated borders and the utilisation of advanced scientific technology to cultivate and exploit border regions. Whether or not it is demarcated by political factors or natural topography or becoming a space for technologically agricultural experiments, the frontier is an unavoidable subject of discussion. Wu indicates that frontiers are not separate and isolated appendages belonging to a specific state but are links connecting multiple regions and continents worldwide.

Furthermore, the development of the modern state's frontiers relied on the evolution and dissemination of a series of geopolitical terminology during the twentieth century, in which social

scientists were vital emissaries to build a knowledge exchange network between countries. Wu attempts to focus on the individual life trajectories of these social scientists to construct a narrative transcending neat national boundaries and standard periods and shedding light on the circulation of people and their ideas. By combining the two perspectives of global history and individual studies, Wu breaks the limitations of time and space and points out that continuations of imperial colonialism projects exist in many modern countries. She also underscores connections, rather than commonalities, among several countries worldwide in the globalising process.

Apart from the introduction and epilogue, there are six chapters, and each of which contains stories about both famous and rarely noticed social scientists. The first two chapters, as Wu indicates, concern agriculture. In Chapter 1, the intersection among historical figures across the Pacific and Atlantic gradually took shape as capitalism began to penetrate the world since the mid-nineteenth century. This revealed a common interest among those ruling elites and scientists in improving agriculture on the frontiers. Then, Wu discusses Japan's colonial experiment in its northern frontiers in Chapter 2. Meiji government turned to Western knowledge and experts from the Chinese imperial model in the second half of the nineteenth century, which established the status of Japan as a transfer hub of Western expertise into Asia. Apart from Japan, other empires, such as Germany and China, also adopted geo-modernity and implemented both internal and external colonisation to maintain or extend their imperial territory when they transformed into nation states. Chapters 3 and 4 examine geographic science and the travels of geographers around the world. In Chapter 3, the protagonists from a variety of countries underlined geography not only as a scientific discipline but as a vital instrument for helping individual states revise their geographical narratives and relations with neighbours. In China's case, the continuity of producing local geographical knowledge encompassing the frontier, as Wu mentions, combines imperial ideology with imported Western expertise from the late Qing to the Republican period, which was attributed to new transregional knowledge networks. The emergence of geopolitics and its transition to geo-modernity is the central topic in Chapter 4. In order to break the siege of the Japanese army and achieve the goal of becoming an independent nation-state, China turned to geopolitics in the first half of the twentieth century by publishing textbooks and literature on national geography. In Chapter 5, Wu focuses on the development of rural areas, which comprised the dissemination of agricultural science and carried out by the ruling elites and scholars who have received philanthropic projects from other countries, especially America. While China was not an isolated case, American philanthropic groups promoted the building of the global scientific foundation. Although the limitations of frontier areas, such as harsh climatic conditions and lack of infrastructure, were obvious, symbols of patriotism were embedded with frontiers, prompting many ambitious people to devote their efforts to remote frontiers. In Chapter 6, Wu sheds light on the global nature of geo-modernity by using the cases in Germany and China to show the convergence of interests in inner colonisation.

In these two countries, the academic theories of natural and social scientists were synchronously leveraged by political leaders to reinforce the regimes in the mid-twentieth century, which passed through different ideological controls and remained active. The content of Chapter 7 is relevant to the process of formulating a new world order, in which Chinese and American natural and social scientists mentioned previously are crucial participants in the second half of the twentieth century. In this chapter, Wu emphasises that the empire existed by disguising itself in the post-war international environment, and the application of science and technology on the frontier continued at this time.

Through this book, Wu depicts a series of pictures illustrating the individual lives of scientists and social scientists who were repeatedly involved in the conflict between regimes in different periods and continents. Rather than simply emphasising commonalities, Wu analyzes the underlying intellectual and political connections among various regions and governments. Global narrative and individual lives are two aspects integrated into this book by Wu's new approach to the writing of modern history. The individual texture is clearly carved on the surface and embedded into the global dynamics, demonstrating that imperial legacies have affected the later nation state and modern state and still to the present.

Transcending the time constraints of the “century” and the boundaries of the state is a new perspective that scholars of Chinese studies need to take from this book. Meanwhile, individual lives can be used to illustrate the meaning of obscure and long-standing concepts of society and the state in the Chinese context.

\* Peigen Xia [夏培根] is a doctoral student in the National University of Singapore, Singapore. Email: e0320453@u.nus.edu.