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# Theorizing Citizenship in Modern China[1]

Robert Culp

**Abstract**
This article reviews the recent scholarship on citizenship in early twentieth-century China and presents a conceptual framework for analyzing citizenship, there and elsewhere, as a complex formation of ideas and practices. The essay asks why citizenship became so important in early twentieth-century China and why Euro-American scholars have been so attentive to it during the last two decades. It draws on the rich historical literature to characterize four distinct dimensions of citizenship in early twentieth-century China. In discussing national membership, political participation and civil rights, cultural citizenship, and social membership, the author reflects on possible vectors of comparison between Chinese and Euro-American approaches to citizenship. Finally, the essay argues that these four aspects can be synthesized and viewed as part of a complex whole that identified Chinese citizenship with active participation in concrete tasks to contribute to national welfare.

## I. Introduction

Citizenship, as an idea and a set of practices, was a dominant concern in Chinese political and intellectual circles during the first half of the twentieth century. European and American students of China now recognize it as such because of the proliferation of writing during the last two decades on this earlier period of Chinese civic action and political theory. Such work has encouraged reconceptualization of a wide range of social and political movements in twentieth-century China. This essay attempts to analyze and interpret this emergent literature on early Chinese citizenship at three different levels.

First, it assesses why citizenship became so central in late Qing (1644-1911) and early Republican (1912-1949) intellectual debates and programs for socio-political reform and why it has become a central focus in recent Euro-American scholarship on twentieth-

century China.[2] I argue that Chinese intellectuals and political elites imagined citizenship as a category of ethico-political action that could transcend perceived limitations in existing modes of political action and moral personhood while continuing late imperial commitments to social responsibility and political engagement. At the same time, I suggest that, starting in the 1980s, renewed debate about political subjectivity, public culture, and civic action in the People's Republican of China (PRC; 1949-) inspired China scholars to look for the genealogical roots of emergent forms of national identity, political participation, and social and cultural politics, many of which were grouped under the rubric of citizenship.

Second, this essay seeks to categorize the polymorphous ideas and practices that came to be associated with citizenship during the late Qing and early Republican periods. Starting in the 1890s, modern Chinese political theorists and activists sought to define citizenship through discussion of Chinese national identity, civic rights and political participation, social membership, and cultural performance of civility. Each of these modes of citizenship aligns with historically rooted approaches to citizenship in the European and American contexts. These parallels invite systematic analysis of similarities and differences between Chinese and Euro-American patterns of corresponding aspects of citizenship.

Third, while contemporary Euro-American scholarship tends to analyze each mode of citizenship in isolation, I ask how we can connect these four fields to fashion a synthetic understanding of early twentieth-century Chinese citizenship. Because late Qing and Republican actors characterized all these different ideas and spheres of action as forms of citizenship, each also inflected the meaning of the term when it was used in other contexts. As a result, the overall meaning of Chinese citizenship was shaped by the mutual influence of these simultaneous approaches, pushing us to think across these dimensions. Drawing on my own work (Culp 2007) on civic education during the Republican period, I suggest that Stuart Hall's idea of "articulation" offers a method for conceptualizing complex discursive formations like citizenship. Although I apply Hall's analytic strategy here to deepen our understanding of Chinese citizenship, I believe his approach provides a ready model for understanding citizenship formations in other contexts as well.

## II. The Origins of Chinese Citizenship

Why were late Qing and early Republican intellectuals, educators, and political leaders so concerned about citizenship? For this group of ethically committed and politically engaged thinkers and activists, the concept of citizenship seemed to offer answers to the dual crises that China confronted at the start of the twentieth century. Domestically, the massive rebellions that rocked China between 1850 and 1873 signaled the deterioration of the late imperial dynastic state and Confucian social order.[3] At the same time, foreign imperialism, which intensified after the disasters of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the Boxer Uprising (1900), further eroded the dynastic state and offered challenging alternatives to both the orthodox ideology of Confucianism and imperial rule (E.g., Rogaski 2004). Elite

intellectuals rallied during the 1890s and 1900s to address both these trends (Chang 1987). The rapid overthrow of the imperial state and formation of a nascent republican polity in 1911 and 1912 made even more pressing the issue of what it would mean to be a citizen in modern China (Esherick 1976; Harrison 2000; Wright 1968). In this environment of crisis and rapid change, nearly all dimensions of the Qing socio-political order came under scrutiny, with intellectuals asking what kinds of moral action would best serve to rebuild the Qing empire as a viable modern nation-state and identifying those qualities and behaviors with citizenship.

Late imperial Chinese ethics and social order were primarily organized around archetypal relations between individuals. The most important of these key social relations were hierarchical interactions between fathers and sons, husbands and wives, and rulers and subjects (Brokaw 1991; King 1985; Munro 1988; Rowe 2001). Critical late Qing social theorists, like reformer Liang Qichao characterized these patterns as personal morality (*si de* 私德), arguing that the focus on dyadic relations left relatively undeveloped the individual's sense of responsibility to society as a whole and calling for a new civic morality (*gong de* 公德) (Chang 1971). According to Liang, "Today we can try to compare old Chinese ethics to new Western ethics. The categories of the old ethics are sovereign and official, father and son, elder and younger brother, husband and wife, and friends. The categories of the new ethics are family, society, and nation. The old ethics emphasize matters involving individuals *vis-à-vis* other individuals. The new ethics emphasize matters involving individuals *vis-à-vis* the group" (as quoted in Wang 1997: 263). Later Sun Yat-sen similarly critiqued the partiality of late imperial China's social ethic in his famous observation that "Foreign observers say that the Chinese are like a sheet of loose sand. Why? Simply because our people have shown loyalty to the family and clan but not to the nation—there has been no nationalism" (Sun 1927: 5). In regard to individual moral duties, Confucianism stressed personal, inwardly focused moral cultivation (*xiushen* 修身) that would guide a person in maintaining harmonious social relations (Munro 1988: 56, chap. 4). Liang Qichao criticized this self-orientation for having limited social impact: "Those who are committed to an ideology of self-control and self-discipline believe that although they do not benefit the group, neither do they harm the group. Is not consciously not benefiting the same as doing harm? How can it be that the group benefits the individual but the individual does not benefit the group?" (Wang 1997: 262)[4] In contrast, Liang and others emphasized dynamic activity in public life that would lead to progressive social development (Chang 1971: 177-189, 216).[5]

Late imperial society did have an ideal of the morally refined, publicly engaged individual who worked for the social good, the Confucian gentleman (*junzi* 君子). Because the ideal of the Confucian gentleman or scholarly elite linked academic achievement, socio-economic privilege, and moral attainment with public action taken on behalf of state and society, it helped to underwrite the introduction of the ideal of modern citizenship in late Qing and Republican China. But in practice gentlemen were historically part of a very small

moral and scholarly elite who took public action in one of two ways, each of which marked their privilege. They assumed an official position in the dynastic state, acting as a minister of the sovereign emperor and guiding the people.[6] Or, they served as moral guides, philanthropists, and managers in their local communities (Ch'ü 1962: 175-185; Hsiao 1960: 145-257; Mair 1985). Liang and other reformers during the late Qing and Republican periods sought to generalize the responsibility for public service to all members of society, prescribing a range of new social activities and calling for popular sovereignty and political rights (Judge 1996: 83-88; Zarrow 1997: 5). In reformer Kang Youwei's formulation, "In the past, nations used the skill of one sovereign, one prime minister, or one general in their struggles; today they use the talent and knowledge of all the nation's citizens" (as quoted in Wang 1997: 267). Further, the late imperial moral elite's loyalty was primarily to the emperor and the universal moral order of Neo-Confucianism, not necessarily to the bounded, horizontally integrated, and sovereign nation-state, which now became central.[7]

Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, an influential group of reformist intellectuals and revolutionary political leaders introduced the idea of citizenship as a way to replace or supplement fundamental elements of the late imperial socio-political order that they felt were inadequate to addressing China's crisis of survival. Those basic dimensions of Qing ethics, society, and politics included a centralized imperial sovereignty, hierarchical interpersonal moral duties rooted in the family, inwardly focused ethical cultivation geared to preserving social harmony, and political authority monopolized by a small, morally superior elite that served the imperial dynast and sought to enact a universal ethic. In contrast, Chinese intellectuals, educators, and political leaders conceived of the citizen as an idealized form of modern person who would be politically active and capable of contributing to the reinvention of imperial China as a strong and wealthy nation-state in the modern world (Fogel 1997: 279-80; Schwartz 1964). In seeking to instigate social and political change by transforming people's behavior as much as by changing organizations and institutions, they followed deep-seated Confucian patterns, even as they developed a very different social ethic that aimed at the modern goals of progressive development and national power.

Three terms were used to connote citizenship in early twentieth-century China: *guomin* 國民, *gongmin* 公民, and *shimin* 市民 (Culp 2007: Introduction; Goldman and Perry 2002: 3-5).[8] *Guomin*, which had an ancient etymology, had traditionally connoted the people of a state or kingdom. As the term was reintroduced to China from Japan around the turn of the century, it represented the members of a horizontally interconnected and bounded national community and implied a primary commitment to national concerns.[9] *Gongmin* can be literally translated as public people. At the most basic level the term meant those in the nation possessing civil rights (*gongquan* 公權), but it also described people engaged with community (*gong* 公) affairs rather than private or personal (*si* 私) interests. Merle Goldman and Elizabeth Perry also establish that *shimin*, or people of the municipality, was often used during the Republican period to claim the rights and privileges that came with

urban residence (Goldman and Perry 2002: 5). Such a conception of community membership paralleled early European meanings of the term and most likely reflected the forms of civic self-management and community identity that were emerging in cities like the trading center of Hankou during the late imperial period (e.g., Rowe 1989).

Although all these terms were translations of "citizen," they were inflected in different ways that aligned with the distinct dimensions of citizenship that I will outline in the following section. *Guomin* emphasized national membership and the individual's identification with a national community. *Gongmin* stressed the individual's participation in the public life of his or her community, participation that could be formalized in political institutions or expressed through cultural expression in the emergent public sphere. *Shimin* shared some of the meanings of civic participation incorporated in the term *gongmin*, but it also suggested a claim to certain privileges incumbent on being a member of an urban community. Such claims were fundamental to social citizenship. The layering of terms for citizenship in early twentieth century China reflected the practical and conceptual complexities of citizenship as a category of identity and form of action.

European and American scholars' interest in citizenship in China has arisen in step with political movements and new dynamics of civic life that have emerged since the post-Mao Reforms began during the 1980s. I believe this timing is causal rather than coincidental. Study of prior forms of citizenship accelerated with scholarly response to student and worker activism in 1989, which reflected a decade of debate on the relationship between social membership and political voice. For instance, historians like Jeffrey Wasserstrom and Joseph Esherick found the roots of contemporary patterns of political protest in the activism of a previous era (Esherick and Wasserstrom 1990; Wasserstrom 1991).[10] Political scientist David Strand (1990) traced a genealogy of forms of civil society from the contentious Republican period to the new openness of the Reform era.[11] In these and other instances, contemporary political dynamics in China caused scholars to revisit the dynamics of the early twentieth century.

Changes since 1989 have continued to generate compelling questions about the history of political and social practices related to citizenship that inspire reconsideration of dynamics during the late Qing and Republican periods. Village and township elections condition our assessment of institutions and dynamics of local self-government during the early twentieth century (e.g., O'Brien 2002).[12] Resurgent popular nationalism that references "national humiliation" and polices Chinese sovereignty echoes and draws from early twentieth-century nationalist discourse, causing scholars to revisit this earlier tradition (Cohen 2002; Gries 2004). In the complex social environment of the post-Mao period, the state and social elites have used definitions of civility (*wenming* 文明) and quality (*suzhi* 素質) to distinguish among social types and to establish the cultural qualities necessary for participation in public life (Anagnost 1997 and 2004; Friedman 2004). These patterns of cultural or symbolic citizenship parallel practices from the early twentieth century that historians are now revisiting. In all these cases, debates related to citizenship in

contemporary China spark interest in the forms of citizenship that preceded them in the early twentieth century.

## III. Four Aspects of Chinese Citizenship

As the foregoing discussion of terminology and the search for historical roots of contemporary patterns of citizenship suggests, there were multiple ways of conceptualizing and practicing citizenship in early twentieth century China. In the plural nature of its citizenship, China was not unique. It is striking, though, that citizenship in China so quickly manifested itself in so many different domains, when it was such a new way of thinking about personhood and political action. T.H. Marshall (1950) noted in his classic reflection on citizenship in Britain that the different dimensions of citizenship there developed over the course of centuries. In China, the process was telescoped into decades, and Chinese theorists and political actors quickly defined at least four vectors of citizenship, which contemporary historians have tended to examine in isolation. These approaches, which were associated with national identity, political participation and rights, cultural citizenship, and social membership, paralleled European and American conceptions of citizenship as they have been described and theorized in recent studies. Such parallels offer an opportunity for comparative work. In the following sections, I characterize the discussion in the Anglophone scholarship of each vector of Chinese citizenship and comment on some of the possibilities for comparative analysis.

### (1) National membership

National identity has been a central thread in Western studies of modern China during the past two decades, reflecting both resurgent Chinese nationalism and the focus on the nation across the social sciences and humanities during the 1980s and 1990s. Recent work demonstrates that, in late Qing and early Republican China as in so many other places, new media, especially newspapers and textbooks, provided a print infrastructure to connect people across China in an integrated community. For instance, over the first three decades of the twentieth century, the major commercial publishing companies—Commercial Press (Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館), Zhonghua Book Company (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局), and World Books (Shijie shuju 世界書局)—developed nationwide distribution networks, through which they sold standardized print commodities, especially the textbooks that were used by students in the growing numbers of modern schools. Newspapers, textbooks, and other kinds of publications also often circulated explicit messages of nationalism.[13] At the same time, the early twentieth century was punctuated by periodic anti-foreign protests that fostered nationalism among a broader, less literate mass public, especially in major urban centers (e.g., Coble 1991; Cohen 2002; Gerth 2003; Wang 2001; Wasserstrom 1991). These processes, together with infrastructure development, the

expansion of national markets for other commodities, and, after 1937, the onset of total war, fostered mass nationalist consciousness (Gerth 2003; Hung 1994).

Studies of late Qing and early Republican Chinese nationalism have traced a tension between racialized and/or ethno-cultural conceptions of the national community focused on the Han people and various forms of civic nationalism, which associated citizenship with political participation in a territorially defined state (Chang 1971; Dikotter 1992; Duara 1995; Fitzgerald 1996; Gladney 1991: 82-87; Karl 2002; Levenson 1965; Townsend 1992). This central tension parallels a key opposition in the theoretical literature on modern nationalism, where some focus on the ways that race and culture have served as grounding categories for national identity and others emphasize common civic participation and fluid modes of imagining community (Anderson 1991; Balakrishnan 1996; Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Brubaker 1992; Chatterjee 1993; Gellner 1983; Smith 1991). The persistence of both approaches throughout the early twentieth century, and indeed into the People's Republic (e.g., Schein 2000: chap. 3), means that they provided a plural discursive field available for citation by nationalist thinkers in specific contexts.[14] The unresolved nature of this tension means that in any given context or historical moment, students of China must be attentive to which conception of nation is in play when we discuss nationalism.

Thinking comparatively, one of the most distinctive features of Chinese nationalism might be the persistence of strong forms of local community affiliation, occasionally associated with ethno-cultural difference, that were popularly viewed as a ground for national identity rather than as a threat to it. Bryna Goodman has persuasively argued, for instance, that native place associations portrayed themselves and were portrayed by others as being "building blocks" of the national community (Goodman 1995: 196-7, 258-60, 269-71, 312-3). In the words of members of the Henan native place association in Shanghai, "Our people's ability to organize is weak. But 'love one's home, love one's native place' sentiment is very strong. For instance [this is expressed in] *huiguan* 會館 and *tongxianghui* 同鄉會. Using this as a base, it is possible for our people to go from the small to the great and from weakness to strength. Nationalism becomes gradually possible." (Goodman 1995: 270) This mosaic or microcosmic formulation of national community circulated widely and was invoked in a range of political arenas in which local communities claimed both local distinctiveness and centrality in the nation-building project. For instance, May-bo Ching illustrates how native place textbooks (*xiangtu jiaokeshu* 鄉土教科書) of the late Qing period, which played various parts in the projects of reformers or revolutionaries, provided a mechanism through which local communities of Cantonese and Hakka claimed to be paradigmatic members of the national community (Ching 2007).[15]

This microcosm-macrocosm approach to Chinese nationalism had the potential to avoid the dichotomy posed by a centralized, homogenizing national imaginary, on one hand, and a fractious, unstable, federalist vision of the nation marked by provincial separatism, on the other.[16] Such formulations can be read in contrast to the totalizing and monolithic strategies

of "official" nationalism, which has been the dominant mode of nationalism in the modern West.[17] Instead of a zero-sum game between center and locality, many Chinese nationalists have viewed local communities as constitutive of the national community.

### (2) Political participation and civic rights

Movements for local self-government and constitutional government were the main vectors of development for political citizenship in the early twentieth century. A number of scholars have identified ways in which urban elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries called for more autonomous elite control over local administration and greater say in determining state policy (Esherick 1976; Rankin 1986; Schoppa 1982; Stapleton 2000; Strand 1989). As the Qing state sought to mobilize its population for nation-building in the first decade of the twentieth century, it established institutions for local self-government that formalized patterns of elite civic action and charted a trajectory of constitutional reform (Thompson 1995). Although the proliferation of self-interested regional military leaders during the early Republican period and the emergence of competing Leninist-style party-states after the 1920s disrupted this nascent constitutionalism, some Chinese intellectuals throughout the Republican period continued to advocate for democratic governance and individual civil liberties (Fung 2000; Grieder 1970; Jeans 1992). Studies of these efforts make clear that discussion of and experiments with political participation and legally consolidating civic rights were a persistent feature of the political landscape in China during the early twentieth century.

Because Euro-American political theory and practice provided the inspiration and many of the models for these experiments, they afford an opportunity for comparison with formations of political citizenship elsewhere. The grounds for comparison, however, have been shifting. In particular, European and American scholars have reassessed Euro-American theories of and approaches to political citizenship in the midst of the state-building that followed the end of the Cold War. These political theorists have explored a central tension in Western thought between civic republicanism, which stresses community solidarity and direct participation, and liberal approaches, which emphasize individual freedom, civil rights, and mediated participation (Alejandro 1993; Beiner 1995; Miller 2000; Mouffe 1992; Oldfield 1990). When we review the scholarship on nascent forms of Chinese political citizenship in light of these contrasting models, its primary concern with tracing a genealogy of Chinese democracy that corresponds to Anglo-American liberalism is striking. In scholars' debates over a Chinese public sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for instance, emphasis was placed on the relative autonomy of elite civic organizations from state control and interference (e.g., Culp 1994; Rankin 1986; Rowe 1990; Strand 1989; *Modern China* 19, no. 3 (1993)). Moreover, accounts of intellectual movements for democracy have stressed advocacy for individual civil liberties and

protection of the rights of the individual from the state (Fung 2000; Grieder 1970; Jeans 1992).

Pursuit of free civic association and securing civil liberties were undoubtedly vital trends in early twentieth century efforts for political change in China. But emphasis on these approaches to political citizenship alone might divert attention from civic republican approaches to political action. Yet civic republicanism, with its focus on the individual citizen's dedication to the public good through both self-discipline and active participation in practical tasks that sustain and develop community welfare, may have been the most widespread and vibrant mode of civic action during this period. This action-based approach to citizenship resonated with late imperial statecraft models of community service but universalized those duties to all members of society and identified the public (*gong*) as the horizontally interconnected community of the nation, rather than the local community and/or the dynastic state.

This claim for the importance of civic republicanism cannot be fully substantiated in the space available here, but I will attempt to sketch out in a preliminary way some foundational evidence for it. For one, I believe it is possible to reconceptualize much of the excellent scholarship on elite philanthropy, community development, and local self-government during the late Qing and early Republic in a civic republican framework rather than reading it as a form of nascent bourgeois civil society. Elite activities often focused on practical tasks to benefit their local communities, and these activities were primarily conceived and practiced as a form of public service.[18] Much less prominent in these activities were claims of individual civil rights and/or efforts to assert personal or class interests in order to alter public policy. Further, military service to achieve national unity and ensure national defense became a privileged mode of enacting citizenship, especially during the late Qing and the late 1920s through the 1940s, echoing Machiavelli's identification of citizenship with military service for the community (Culp 2007: chap. 5; Huang 2000: chap. 2; Perry 2006).[19] Concrete and practical service to the public, whether imagined at the local or national level, was primary.[20]

A similar concern with mobilizing individual citizens to act for the public good in practical, immediate ways also resonates in the writings of some key theorists of the Republican period. Hao Chang long ago noted that Liang Qichao's portrayal of the modern citizen as a dynamic actor dedicated to national welfare resonated with Rousseau's mass democracy and conceptions of civic virtue rooted in Machiavelli's writing (Chang 1971: 192-193, 216-219; cf. Nathan 1985: chap. 3). In addition, both Chen Duxiu and Sun Yat-sen, who took the lead in promoting political reform in Republican China during the 1910s and 1920s, theorized versions of democratic self-government that resembled civic republicanism much more than liberal representative government (Chen 1993; Sun 1953). They emphasized the importance of developing self-government in small-scale, localized groups—the county for Sun Yat-sen and "small local self-government groups and various kinds of occupational unions" for Chen Duxiu—with the idea that these would be cells or

components of larger political entities. Within these organizations, they advocated active participation by all members in concrete tasks related to the life of the groups themselves. These could include matters like management of education, elections, roads, public health, grain reserve storage, water control, and elimination of destructive insects.

While these are only two examples, they are from China's leading modern social theorist and from two men who were founders of the Leninist parties—the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—that emerged during the 1920s and became the main political forces in China for the rest of the twentieth century. Despite their later organizational and ideological divergence, I posit that both these parties continued to imagine political participation in civic republican terms that stressed practical contributions to the public welfare made by all individuals in local communities.[21]

Begged by the civic republican formulation of citizenship is the question of who would be called upon to serve the public in what ways. Would public service be uniform across categories of gender and class, say, or differentiated according to kind of citizen?[22] Literature on women's education during the late Qing and early Republican periods suggests that many elite social reformers and educators first aimed to educate women for household-based activities, calling on them to be, in Joan Judge's apt words, "mothers of citizens" who would contribute to the nation through activities in the household (Bailey 2001; Judge 2002; McElroy 2001: 348-62). But, as Judge (2002: 25) also notes, revolutionaries tended to portray women as being active citizens in their own right. Moreover, the combination of new chances for education and widespread calls for national protest and service seems to have created opportunities for women to take more overt action in the public sphere. For instance, in Wang Zheng's striking collection of memoirs of Republican-era women, we see Lu Lihua independently establishing and directing women's physical education schools as a mode of national service that also allowed her to claim citizenship in the public sphere (Wang 1999: chap. 4).[23] Calls for public service created openings for diverse categories of people to assume the role of active citizen. However, as Tani Barlow (1994: 269-273) persuasively argues in her analysis of the CCP's formulation of the category *funü* 婦女 (woman) during the communist revolution, social groups engaged in civic action could also be susceptible to definition and mobilization by the party-state on its terms.

### (3) Cultural citizenship

Even as intellectuals and political leaders promoted projects for political reform, a broad cross-section of late Qing and Republican society came to use symbols and cultural performance in newly developed public spaces, such as parks, squares, playing fields, and commercial streets, to express their political views and affiliations. These ways of using symbols and cultural performances for political expression can be loosely grouped under the framework of cultural citizenship.

Interactions between Chinese and foreign communities in Treaty Ports and perhaps in Japan during the late Qing introduced a broad repertoire of new symbols and ceremonial practices into China (Dunch 2001; Goodman 2000).[24] Henrietta Harrison (2000) has masterfully illustrated how Chinese elites during the early Republic crafted a symbolic language of modern national dress, national symbols, and forms of symbolic performance that became standard elements of political expression in the public sphere throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Queues were abandoned for frock coats and then Sun Yat-sen suits; women unbound their feet and donned *qipao*. (Finnane 1996; Harrison 2000: chap. 2, 175-179) Competing national flags were the most central and visible components of a vast lexicon of national symbols (Fitzgerald 1996: 180-185; Harrison 2000: 98-105, 173-5), which also included the iconic image of the national map (Culp 2007: chap. 2), the politically encoded national calendar (Culp 2007: chap. 6; Harrison 2000: 67-9, 156-8; Shao 2004: 86-88), and labels, signs, and placards of every imaginable kind (Cohen 2002). These were strategically employed in emergent forms of stable and routinized civic ritual and more fluid and contestatory political street theater.[25] Consumption of national products became another highly visible way to perform citizenship, especially for women, who were seen as the main consumers for their households and as those most often tempted by foreign luxury products (Gerth 2003: chap. 7). Individual and team sports cultivated citizens' healthy bodies, enacted various models of socio-political order, and demonstrated publicly the vigor of the national body (Morris 2004). However, athletics' emphasis on the physical could also highlight differences between male and female ways of being citizens (e.g., Morris 2004: 86-95). Starting in the Republican period, then, a wide array of social groups seized on diverse new modes of cultural expression and civic performance as means of political action.

The power of these new symbols and forms of expression is indicated by the efforts that the Nationalist Party made to contain and manage them. Party leaders sought to control political theater and regulate political ritual, banning commemorative ceremonies associated with the CCP and substituting party-centered ritual forms that incorporated the clients of the party state and made spectators of the vast majority of citizens (Cohen 2002; Culp 2007: chap. 6; Harrison 2000, chaps. 4-6; Wakeman 1995). The bows and oaths, songs and silences of the weekly memorial meeting for Sun Yat-sen became a standard model for many public ceremonies, and participants were recruited through institutions controlled by the party.[26] At the same time, great energy went into the project of regulating dress, demeanor, and decorum through the New Life Movement, which Chiang Kai-shek started in 1934 in an effort to transform the nation starting with the individual (Dirlik 1975; Friedman 2002).

In an earlier generation, scholars like Mary Wright (1957: 300-312) seized on the "traditional" quality of Nationalist Party efforts to reintroduce Confucian modes of regulating behavior through the New Life Movement. But perhaps more striking now about the emergent public culture of this period is the pervasiveness of European and American

symbols and standards of behavior and expression. Foreign influence is clear whether we focus on Chinese elites' adoption of European models for ordering public space in late Qing and early Republican Shanghai or Suzhou, Nanjing or Nantong, and Guangzhou (Carroll 2006; Honig 1992; Lipkin 2006; Shao 2004; Tsin 1999), or examine the proto-fascist elements of the New Life Movement's militarized discipline (Dirlik 1975). Chinese elites and state actors consistently used these foreign models to craft modes of civility to respond to European, American, and Japanese critiques of Chinese customs and practices during the early twentieth century.[27] The foreign symbols and ritual templates Chinese leaders used were viewed as iconic of the modern nation-state form (Harrison 2000: 83-4). What neo-traditionalism we see clearly took the form of invented tradition, with the *qipao* perhaps the most striking example (Finnane 1996; Chang 2003). The commitment to incorporating new, foreign standards of decorum and ritual forms contrasts with patterns of invented tradition in other nation-building contexts, where historical roots are often fetishized.[28]

Beyond focusing on the issue of how "foreign" or "Chinese" the new symbolic domain of cultural citizenship was, a further challenging and important question might be why cultural expression and ritual practice appear to have been such privileged sites for enacting citizenship in early twentieth-century China. One possibility is that symbolic expression's high visibility made it unusually prominent in the print media of the period and thus able to seize the attention of later researchers. Another possible answer is that the many limitations and failures of institutional politics during the early Republic made symbolic expression seem like an attractive alternative site for political action. In the context of chronic civil war and pervasive foreign incursions, formal political institutions proved to be clumsy mechanisms, had limited influence, and were closed to the vast majority of Chinese people (Nathan 1976). Under Nationalist Party rule, institutional politics was limited to those inside the party, leaving political theater as one of the only venues for popular political expression, one that was politically loaded because of party efforts to claim legitimacy symbolically (Wasserstrom 1990: 292-293).

I also hypothesize that the Republican emphasis on civility and ceremony was a legacy of the late imperial period, during which both state officials and social elites sought to create political stability and cultural unity through promulgation of normative standards of behavior and orthoprax ritual forms. Chen Hongmou's project of moral transformation (*jiaohua* 教化) foreshadows the civilizing mission of Republican-era elites and states (Rowe 2001). Moreover, eighteenth century China witnessed an explosion of ritual at all levels of the state and in elite households, reestablishing ceremony as a key idiom for social expression and political action.[29] As reformers and revolutionaries sought to create a modern nation-state in contrast to the late imperial state, they were compelled either to displace or to occupy that site.

When we view early Republican cultural citizenship as a reaction or response to late imperial ritualism and civilizing projects, we see states and elites consciously striving to change the content of those symbolic practices to fit the more horizontal socio-political

formation of the modern republican nation-state. However, it seems that in many instances hierarchical relations of authority were subtly re-inscribed through new ritual forms and civilizing projects that, at times, explicitly aimed at broadening the ranks of the citizenry through mass inclusion in civic ritual and dissemination of new standards of civility. Thus, Henrietta Harrison (2000: 118) suggests that new civic rituals like celebration of National Day (October 10) were largely dominated by "certain modern, government-sponsored institutions and associations." Likewise, Sara Friedman portrays the civilizing mission of the New Life Movement as a way for the Nationalist Party to establish itself as a necessary authority for the guidance and control of civic life (Friedman 2002). Moreover, Emily Honig (1992) and Lydia Liu (1995: chap. 2) capture how social elites and leading intellectuals marked their social authority by critiquing and seeking to reform popular habits deemed to be uncivilized.[30] Differential levels of cultural literacy meant that cultural citizenship, though performed in the public sphere, could serve as a technique for status differentiation.

## (4) Social citizenship

The foregoing discussion of status distinctions raises the important issue of social class and who is considered a fully vested member of society. The Anglophone sociological literature discusses this aspect of citizenship in terms of the right to claim certain kinds of goods and services from the state. The welfare state has served as the primary institutional mechanism for sustaining a minimum level of economic welfare as a function of social membership (Marshall 1950; Turner 1993). Social welfare marks the boundaries of the political community and ensures the basic human dignity of all its members, even if it does not engineer full socio-economic equality, a condition that parallels the formal equality of civic and political rights. The assumption is that creating a common ground of basic welfare establishes conditions that allow all citizens, even the economically disadvantaged, to inhabit a shared community and exercise civic and political rights.

In contrast to this logic of social citizenship, which seeks some degree of commonality in the life conditions of the citizen, Hanchao Lu describes a distinctive late imperial Chinese institutionalization of urban poverty that he maintains persisted into the Republican period. Lu portrays the urban poor as a corporately defined professional subgroup, parallel to many others organized in guilds during the late imperial and Republican periods: "mendicancy . . . gradually constituted a profession, and the spontaneously formed and autonomously run beggars' guilds that were crucial to that profession came to provide an institutionalized way for the myriad urban poor to survive with little or no help from the state." (Lu 2005: 6-7; cf. chaps. 4-5) As such, the urban poor could claim a recognized, if subaltern, position in the social landscape of China's cities alongside other corporately defined and differentiated social groups. Lu argues persuasively that chronic indigence and beggars' guilds continued to be parts of Chinese urban life, despite efforts by late imperial and modern states to

change those conditions (Lu 2005: 5-11, chap. 4). Yet, even while acknowledging the practical limits of state and social relief efforts, we might also consider how modern state and social actors conceived of the poor as social and political people and how states and elites related to those people over time.

R. Bin Wong has argued convincingly that some conception of social rights was common to late imperial elites, even if it did not parallel exactly the European idea of the welfare state as it emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “Chinese officials and elites had long made commitments through their Confucian paternalism to popular social welfare; the substantive content of European social rights was broadly mirrored in Chinese welfare concerns, even if the processes creating these traits differed.” (Wong 1999: 104) Similarly, Dorothy Solinger has analyzed how claims of rights and services *vis-à-vis* the party-state have served to define differential forms of social membership in the People’s Republic (Solinger 1999). For the late imperial state, Mencian ideals of the ruler’s responsibility to benefit the people animated the commitment to popular welfare; in the PRC a socialist ideal of fundamental socio-economic equality, or at least guaranteed basic subsistence, has been primary. During the Republican period, Sun Yat-sen (1927: 151-212) formulated his idea of “people’s livelihood” (*minsheng* 民生), which offered an influential alternative to late imperial and Marxist approaches to social welfare while drawing strategically from both of them.[31] Building on the work of moderate socialists and social reformers, such as the Americans Henry George and Maurice William, Sun asserted the responsibility of the state to sustain minimal levels of food, clothing, and housing for all the people through state management of resources. In Sun’s view, surplus value and social production was to benefit the people as a whole, not a small minority in one class, as seemed to be happening under capitalism. But he also eschewed social conflict and class struggle as a method for ameliorating social inequality, focusing instead on regulation of capital and state-mediated programs to equalize land rights. More generally, Sun viewed poverty within China as the result of economic underdevelopment, and he promoted state-led industrial development as a way to raise national wealth and, consequently, popular welfare. Sun’s theory expressed a commitment to making social welfare a fundamental aspect of Chinese citizenship. It also privileged the state as the agency that would determine access to resources and establish priorities for development.

How, then, was social welfare work conducted, if at all, during the Republic, and how was it conceptualized in relation to the overall constitution of the polity? Did late imperial models continue to predominate, or did the modern ideologies of Marx or Sun? Recent work by Nara Dillon, Zwia Lipkin, and Janet Chen reveals that states and elites actively engaged in relief and social welfare work in Republican China, with varying implications for the socio-political status of the poor.

Nara Dillon (2008), for instance, demonstrates that elite networks in Shanghai during the 1930s formed the basis of an extensive social welfare system that was capable of providing basic goods and services for vast numbers of refugees during wartime crises in

1932 and 1937. After the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the Nationalist government aspired to centralize control over social welfare projects and displaced the elite networks that had been frayed by the political polarization of both World War II and the Civil War (1946-1949). In practice, the Nationalist government failed to establish a stable tax base for its welfare programs and continued to depend on social elites, who in many instances felt threatened by and alienated from the regime. Still, throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Shanghai's elites and governments, in partnership, sustained a substantial welfare network to care for the city's needy. Similarly, Lipkin (2006: chap. 2) argues that Nanjing's municipal authorities, and to a lesser extent the Nationalist central government, provided winter relief and disaster assistance for the displaced poor who routinely made their way to the national capital during the 1920s and 1930s. In doing so, they acted as organs of an aspirant national state that sought to demonstrate that it could support the people in a time of crisis. As in Shanghai, however, limited state resources meant that local government leaders often had to turn to private donors and civic organizations to fund aid efforts.

In both these cases we see a modernizing state and social elites taking responsibility for the welfare of the dispossessed. Bin Wong's distinction between late imperial relief projects and modern forms of social citizenship raises the important question of why China's modern states and elites took on these relief projects. Were they expressive of late imperial ideas of benevolence that aimed to maintain social order and legitimize the state? Did Sun Yat-sen's idea of *minsheng* support a new nationalist logic that viewed the poor as national citizens who, as such, deserved a basic level of subsistence, in part so they could act as citizens? Lipkin (2006: 64) suggests that, even though the Nanjing government's overwhelming concern was to erase the eyesore of the urban poor, the latter logic of national citizenship started to be operative during Nanjing decade. "Representing the Nationalist Party and the central government, which aspired to rule a united China and create a Chinese nation, the municipality's duties included extending services to all Chinese people, subjects-now-turned-citizens." When resources ran short, however, the Nanjing municipal government invoked another register of citizenship—that of the municipal citizen (*shimin*)—to delineate who should have access to urban entitlements, thereby practically excluding many migrants who flooded Nanjing from outlying rural areas.

Janet Chen (2005) further suggests that an implicit logic of citizenship underpinned government policies regarding vagrancy and the criminalized poor in late Qing and Republican urban China (Beijing and Shanghai), but it was a mode of citizenship based as much on duties as on rights. New penal institutions for poverty management like the workhouse aimed to transform the supposedly indolent and parasitic poor, who sapped the nation's strength, into productive citizens, who contributed to it. Similarly, Lipkin (2006: 219-227) finds Nanjing's authorities during the 1930s establishing institutions to transform indolent beggars into industrious citizens who would be productive and "useful." Rather than social welfare as entitlement, we have here social reform for empowerment in the mode of a familiar nationalist logic that marks each person as a citizen who is a potential

contributor to the collective project of national strength.[32] At the same time, Chen (2005: 156-165) finds that the urban poor proved adept at using their formal status as national citizens to claim economic benefits, such as when Shanghai's hut dwellers defended their homes from wholesale removal by the Shanghai Municipal Council.

These pioneering works, then, suggest that social rights in early twentieth-century China involved a calculus of claims of basic social welfare and also expectations for productive labor for the nation-state. Sun Yat-sen's idea of *minsheng* pointed toward a Chinese version of state welfare for all citizens in the national community, while a nation-building ethos focused on collective strength sought to mobilize the bodies of the poor for production. Further work on the varied and complex parameters and permutations of that calculus would deepen our understanding of Chinese conceptions of social citizenship. Also still open to discussion is the question of how distinctive this calculus was in comparison to social welfare in European-American-Japanese contexts.

## IV. Synthesizing Citizenship

How can we relate the four dimensions of citizenship outlined above? Although each area of concern is framed independently, their common reference to the ideal and practice of citizenship means that each dimension played a role in shaping the meaning of citizenship in the late Qing and Republican periods. This potential for different aspects to inflect the meaning of citizenship suggests that, even if we focus at the empirical level on a particular dimension of citizenship, we must at least consider other categories of civic membership and action in order to grasp what citizenship meant at any given moment. For instance, as noted above, the importance and value of cultural citizenship in Republican China may have been enhanced by the challenges faced by efforts to establish stable forms of institutional politics. Or, the language of national membership may have given certain groups of urban poor, such as Shanghai's shack dwellers, a new basis for claiming welfare rights in their communities. Our understanding of different dimensions of citizenship is transformed when we analyze them in relation to one another. Thus, reading across these dimensions, each of which has its own logic and sphere of operation, is a more complex project than deciding which level or dimension is fundamental and determines the others.

Stuart Hall's (1985; 1996) concept of articulation provides a valuable method for analyzing social formations in which multiple discourses and/or arenas of action mutually interrelate to form a complex system. By articulation, Hall means the linkages among diverse discourses, such as those of race, class, and gender, which develop over time through political negotiation and social practice. As people use concepts and enact patterns of practice, associations and connections are built up across discourses or arenas of social action so that terms in one discourse or actions in one field will evoke and reinforce those in other discourses or fields. They become, in other words, articulated, that is both expressed and linked, together. For instance, Hall (1985: 110-114) suggests how the meaning of the

term “black” in colonial Jamaica was shaped through parallels among discourses of race, the political economy of slavery, and the potent metaphorical imagery of Christianity. Homologous oppositions reinforce one another to give the term meaning that, in any given moment of usage, resonates with the associations it acquires in the other domains.

Drawing on Hall’s concept of articulation, I believe we can define a Chinese republican approach to citizenship that oriented all the foregoing domains of citizenship toward active contribution to the national community. This view of republican citizenship comes through most clearly in the civic republican approach to political participation, but it was echoed in other dimensions as well. The territorial nation-state as conceptualized by Liang Qichao and others figured the national community as a civic collective constituted by all who contributed to the collective welfare. National citizenship was associated with action by all. The approach to poor relief discussed by Janet Chen and Zwia Lipkin builds from the imperative to make all citizens into active bodies that can contribute to the nation. Indeed, even more reactive approaches to poor relief cast the poor as being valued as members of the national community and/or civic community. Projects aspiring to cultivate individual civility portrayed it as a way for individuals to build a modern public culture and the image of the nation as a civilized community. The citizen, here, is recruited as an active performer of civilized culture. In combination, the different dimensions of discourse about national membership, political participation, cultural citizenship, and socio-economic membership reinforced one another to create an image of the citizen as an active contributor to the project of national development.

This mode of articulating republican citizenship emerged most clearly in schools, which were charged with the responsibility of cultivating China’s modern citizens (Culp 2007). There, through classes in civics, history, and geography, various training regimes, and civic rituals, teachers and students defined the meaning and practice of citizenship more explicitly than was common in other social domains. But the rapid proliferation of studies of specific aspects of citizenship, as discussed above, offers grounds for arguing that the articulation of active republican citizenship held more generally during China’s late Qing and Republican periods. In calling for the citizen to contribute actively to building the collective welfare of the nation as a whole, social theorists, political leaders, and a range of social groups generated a mode of citizenship that continued to resonate into the Maoist period (1949-1976).

## Notes

[1] This article was originally published as “Synthesizing Citizenship in Modern China” in the journal *History Compass* 5/6 (2007): 1833-1861. The author thanks Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Ltd for permission to republish the article here (license number 2851360624484). Portions of the article were drawn from the author’s book *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center,

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[2] For the purposes of this discussion, the "late Qing" period can be dated from 1895 and the conclusion of the first Sino-Japanese War, which triggered an acute sense of crisis among Chinese elites that motivated intensified social and political reforms. The "early Republic" is often associated with the period between the 1911 Revolution and the founding of the Nationalist government in 1927. A more appropriate cut-off date in terms of this discussion might be the start of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, for the onset of total war fundamentally altered many social and political dynamics that persisted from the 1910s into the 1930s.

[3] For the classic account of the long-term, structural roots of this domestic crisis, see Kuhn and Mann 1980. For the socio-political changes set in motion by those rebellions, see Kuhn 1970; Min 1989; and Rankin 1986.

[4] See also Angle and Svensson 2001, 6-14.

[5] Among Liang's contemporaries, the translator and commentator Yan Fu also emphasized dynamism in a competitive world. See Schwartz 1964.

[6] For the most developed analysis of the late imperial moral and intellectual elite's responsibility for state and social service, see Rowe 2001. Cf. Munro 1988: 144-7.

[7] For the contrast between the nation as a bounded moral community and Confucian universalism in the thought of Liang Qichao, see Chang 1971: 157-64. Cf. Levenson 1965, 1: 95-9.

[8] Goldman and Perry suggest that *gongmin* came to displace *guomin*. My work on civic education suggests that educators and students continued to use *guomin* through the Republican period.

[9] Lydia Liu (1995: 308) identifies *guomin* as a "return graphic loan word," or an ancient Chinese term that was reintroduced in China from Japan with novel, modern associations.

[10] Wasserstrom (1999) has continued to draw such historical parallels between the political dynamics of the two eras with great sensitivity. Andrew Nathan (1985) similarly looked to the late Qing and Republican periods to find the origins of early Reform Era debates about political participation and representation during the so-called Democracy Wall Movement.

[11] See, also, Merle Goldman's (2005) account of more recent efforts to claim civil rights.

[12] See also Baoguang He's article in this volume.

[13] For newspapers, see Judge 1996; Mittler 2004. For commercial publishing and textbooks, see Culp 2007: chaps. 1-2; Hon and Culp 2007; Lee 1999; Reed 2004: chap. 5.

[14] For analysis of this tension in Republican-period history and geography textbooks, see Culp 2007: chap. 2.

[15] See, too, Barbara Mittler's (2004: chap. 5) discussion of the the influential Shanghai newspaper *Shenbao*'s efforts to identify the "Shanghairen" with Chinese modernity.

[16] For this tension as it plays out during the 1920s, see Duara 1995: chap. 6; Fitzgerald 1996: chap. 4.

[17] See Anderson (1991: chap. 6) on "official" nationalism. For one example of its institutionalization in nineteenth-century France, see Weber 1976.
[18] See, for instance, Zhang Jian's many reform projects during the late Qing. (Bastid 1988)
[19] Given the disruption caused by self-serving warlord armies, however, military service was a fraught arena for performing citizenship. Military mobilization for national salvation could be most directly related to citizenship.
[20] For a fuller discussion of the importance of the civic republican approach to political participation and how it was encouraged through student self-government organizations, see Culp 2007: chap. 3.
[21] I develop this argument fully in Culp 2007: chap. 3 and Conclusion.
[22] In addressing this question, I focus here on gender, but the issue of parameters of civic involvement was just as pressing in terms of social class. For instance, in her recent study of martial citizenship, Elizabeth Perry (2007: 18-20) has described a tension between community-based, class-based, and creed-based approaches to militia organization. See, too, the discussion of social citizenship below.
[23] Cf., Gilmartin 1995: part II; McElroy 2001: 362-367.
[24] Many reform and revolutionary leaders were in Japan during the late Meiji period (1868-1912), when there was a proliferation of state ritual. ( Fujitani 1996)
[25] For the distinction between political ritual and political theater, see Esherick and Wasserstrom 1990. For public performance as a site for political expression and action, see Culp 2007: chap. 6; Goodman 2002; Strand 2002; and Wasserstrom 1991.
[26] For a full discussion of the weekly meeting as a ritual template, see Culp 2007: chap. 6.
[27] For an example of a foreign critique, see Arthur Smith's commentary and Lydia Liu's nuanced reading of Lu Xun's response to it. Smith 1894; Liu 1995: chap. 2. On Sun Yat-sen's response to Euro-American critiques, see Fitzgerald 1996: 103-106.
[28] Note, for instance, Meiji oligarchs' concern with constructing both "traditional" and "modern" symbolic associations for the imperial house. Fujitani 1996. Cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.
[29] For the eighteenth century ritual revival, see Chow 1994; Zito 1997. For insightful analysis of the modern legacies of late imperial ritualism, see Pomeranz 1997; Watson 1993.
[30] Students, too, claimed social authority through mastery of patterns of modern culture and attempts to instill them in the common people. See Culp 2007: chaps. 5 and 7.
[31] For a synthetic analysis of Sun's approach to people's livelihood, see Bergere 1998: 381-391.
[32] Along these lines, many Republican-period civics textbooks characterized citizens as constitutive cells who could contribute to the collective benefit of the social organism. See Culp 2007: chap. 4.

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