Introduction:
1911 Revolution at the Boundaries

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The year 2011 was the centennial of the 1911 Revolution. There have been many memorial symposia, seminars, and other events in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan celebrating this historical turning point. Also, many Chinese Studies scholars in Japan have organized and attended related international conferences in Tokyo, Yokohama, Kobe, and Fukuoka.¹

This special issue is a translated volume of the five papers submitted to “The 1911 Revolution in Global History,” a symposium held by the “Organizing Committee for the Conference Commemorating the Anniversary of the 1911 Revolution” in Tokyo and Kobe. The papers in this volume, however, were not initially prepared and drafted for this issue. Rather, they were collected by the editor under the theme, “1911 Revolution at the boundaries.” As the editor of this special issue, I alone am responsible for the selection and arrangement of these works.

“Boundaries,” as mentioned here, refers to social and cultural boundaries during the 1911 Revolution. These specifically include secret societies at the social periphery (Sun, Yamada), Christianity as a foreign civilization (Doi), and ethnic differences (Tachibana, Kobayashi). Needless to say, this volume does not intend to exhaustively cover every scope regarding social and cultural boundaries during the Revolution. Gender, class, regional diversity, and urban-rural relationships are all meaningful topics of discussion on the Revolution and its boundaries. Indeed, some presentations at the Tokyo and Kobe conferences covered these aspects. Therefore, this issue represents only one perspective of recent research on the

1911 Revolution in Japan. Yet, we believe this perspective will provide inspiration for readers to comprehensively reconsider the Revolution and other revolutionary activities in modern China.

There are two reasons for introducing the sociocultural “boundary” as a keyword for Japan’s new findings on the 1911 Revolution. First, in contrast to earlier studies, which concentrated on authority and institutional changes, we aim to open the domain to social and cultural history to enable a more pluralistic understanding of history. Second, we hope to publish Japan’s original perspectives and findings on modern and contemporary China Studies with influence from the mainland and Taiwan.

In “Secret Societies and the 1911 Revolution,” Jiang Sun argues that secret societies’ organizational contribution to the Revolution was limited. Yet, their reproductive mechanism has continued to generate representations of “secret society revolutions” in historical accounts since 1911. “Shan (Goodness) and Revolution” by Masaru Yamada offers an analysis of how mass culture penetrated and influenced elite politics. These papers are important for analyzing not only the Revolution itself, but also the relationship between the Revolution and secret societies.

“‘Rediscovery’ of Liang A-Fa: From a Perspective of the 1911 Revolution and Reinterpreting the Taiping Rebellion” by Ayumu Doi also accounts for the mystifying process of the Revolution. Doi analyzes the relationship between the foreign religion of Christianity and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Describing how the “discovery” of Liang Fa and his accomplishment could change the historical account of the Revolution and the Chinese cultural boundary, this paper brought the complexity of history to the fore.

The Revolution in 1911 was not only a republican revolution that overthrew the authoritarian dynasty, but also a national revolution that reunified many ethnic groups of the Qing Dynasty under the slogan, “Five Races under One Union (wuzu gonghe).” Integrating the rulers and the ruled was a democratization process that brought class boundaries into question. Unification of different ethnicities complicated ethnic boundary issues in this period. The 1911 Revolution foreshadowed the complication of these two boundaries. Two papers in this volume deal with issues of national “independence.” Tachibana’s “The 1911 Revolution and ‘Mongolia’: Independence, Constitutional Monarchy, or Republic” and Kobayashi’s “Tibet in the Era of the 1911 Revolution,” analyze integration (the centripetal force) and dismantlement (the centrifugal force) in the Mongolian and Tibetan regions, respectively. These works help us understand the origins of contemporary China’s ethnic issues by presenting detailed descriptions of the tension between these centripetal and centrifugal forces.

We hope this volume will help readers gain insight into new and interesting
trends in Japan’s 1911 Revolution studies. Findings from the aforementioned symposium, “The 1911 Revolution in Global History,” were compiled in Japanese following the conferences in Tokyo and Kobe. For details on these compilations, please refer to related materials. Also, the current status and future mission of Japan’s 1911 Revolution studies were extensively covered at the Tokyo conference. We hope interested readers will refer to them as well.

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