Leaves, Silkworms, Yue Fei: Ways of Imagining the Territory in 1930s China

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LEAVES, SILKWORMS, YUE FEI: WAYS OF IMAGINING THE TERRITORY IN 1930S CHINA

YU-CHI CHANG

ABSTRACT: During the Nationalist period (1928–1949) in China, the notion that China’s territory mirrors the shape of a begonia or a mulberry leaf gained wide recognition. This analogy ingrained itself into public perceptions of modern China’s boundaries and was often assumed without question. As foreign forces—symbolized by silkworms—encroached upon the leaf-like territory, the leaf trope emerged as a platform for various patriotic appeals during wartime. This research explores the evolution of the leaf trope for China’s territory in the 1930s, probing the historical and cultural connotations embedded in it. The discussion expands to incorporate intellectual resources associated with the Song-era military commander Yue Fei and the leaf trope, as they jointly influenced the portrayal of China’s territory across textual and visual mediums. In this light, territorial conceptualizations in modern China were shaped by ideological constructs envisioning a future rooted in the past.

KEYWORDS: begonia leaf, geo-body, Manchuria, mulberry leaf, silkworms, territory

Open the map of China,
My heart trembles, fearing not to sing,
The light reflects on a lake of tears,
Highlighting the fragmented territory.

Open the map of China,
It resembles a begonia leaf,
Her history,
Is a solemn and tragic poem.

—Song Jianqiao, “Open the Map of China”

Featured in the “patriotic literature” (愛國文藝 aiguo wenyi) section of a periodical, Song Jianqiao’s poem from 1930, “Open the Map of China,” contemplates China’s
historical landscape and grapples with the imagery of “fragmented territory” (破碎的山河 posui de shanhe)—a somber depiction of the geo-body of the Republic of China (ROC). This portrayal encapsulates a widely held belief in modern China: the modern Chinese state has inherited “territorial losses” due to a series of military and diplomatic setbacks since the late Qing era. The narrative paints a picture of a China vulnerable to encroachment as the territorial gains the Qing Empire made through conquest have eroded over time. During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), such a narrative of lamenting “lost territories” was widely disseminated, frequently portraying the ROC’s territory as consistent, unified, and even enduring through the ages. This presumption buttressed assertions about the significance of territorial integrity and helped cultivate the genre of “lost territories” in both visual and textual forms.

Since the late Qing, geography, imbued with interpretations of history, civilization, and geopolitics, has played a vital role in shaping discourses of China’s modern territoriality. During the Nationalist period, the task of constructing a persuasive narrative about the state of China’s territory emerged as a priority in political, cultural, and educational spheres. This included a retrospective reconstruction of the ROC’s temporal and spatial foundation, as well as projections for the nation’s future. For instance, history and geography textbooks endeavored to depict a stable national territory and underscore the threats jeopardizing China’s geo-body. Starting in 1928, when the Nationalist regime nominally unified China, discussions about the past and present conditions of China’s territory consistently featured in print media such as textbooks, geographic publications, newspapers, and periodicals. These narratives, both textual and visual, sought to advance


two interconnected arguments. First, while the conclusion of the Northern Expedition in 1928 seemed to achieve territorial unification, China’s territory under the Nationalist regime was still tarnished by “unequal treaties,” territorial cessions, unresolved territorial disputes, and foreign concessions and spheres of influence inherited from the late Qing and Beiyang periods. Second, potential threats to sovereignty, particularly the military pressure from the Japanese Empire, were seen as challenges to China’s territorial integrity.

The analogy of a leaf symbolizing China’s territory, as depicted in the aforementioned poem, wove narratives of past “territorial losses” into the present-day crisis. Prior to the Nationalist period, the trope of the leaf—characterized by both the begonia leaf (秋海棠葉 qiuhaitang ye) and the mulberry leaf (桑葉 sang ye)—had arguably become one of the most prevalent analogies for describing and visualizing China’s territory. However, the raw visual resemblance between a leaf and China’s territory, making the leaf-territory analogy an effective mnemonic, was only part of the reason for its widespread adoption in the geographic narratives of the 1930s. As alluded to by the poem, territory shaped like a begonia leaf presents not only geographic information about China’s boundaries but also a “solemn and tragic” past that shaped the territory into its current form. It was various cultural and historical references, ingrained in the conceptualization, articulation, and visualization of China’s territory, that gave life to the trope of the leaf and to related geographic narratives, allowing them to resonate with a broad Chinese audience amid the Japanese invasion during the 1930s and the 1940s.

The metaphorical representation of China’s territory as a begonia leaf or a mulberry leaf echoes Benedict Anderson’s notion of the “map-as-logo.” Arguably, Thong-chai Winichakul’s analytical concept of the “geo-body”—used to understand territorial embodiment and the basis for Anderson’s map-related ideas—could also be applied to explain the conceptualization of the leaf as a symbol of China’s territory. While maps are the most common tools for illustration of national boundaries and dissemination of geographic knowledge, other media such as “map-like” images, logo maps, and visual analogies offer unique ways of delivering spatial information and nurturing conceptions about territories. The leaf, functioning as a visual emblem and an incarnation of China’s geo-body, represents more than just the physicality of national territory. For some in 1930s China, the geo-body was an organism imbued with “the soul of the nation” (國魂 guo hun). The demise of the nation’s soul was equated with leaving behind only a dried corpse resembling a (withered) begonia leaf. Simultaneously, the withering of the leaf would represent the loss of the body that houses the soul.

6 Culp, Articulating Citizenship, 78; Zarrow, Educating China, 232–33; Huang Donglan, “Shin-matsu · minkoku ki chiri kyōkasho no kūkan hyōshō—ryōdo · kyōiki · kokuchi” [Spatial representations in geography textbooks during the late Qing and the Republican period: territory, domain, and national humiliation], in Namiki Yorihisa, Ōsato Hiroaki, and Sunayama Yukio, eds., Kindai Chūgoku · kyōkasho to Nihon [Modern China: textbooks and Japan] (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 2010), 233–65. For a discussion of historical conceptions of Chinese territories, see Ge Zhaoguang, He wei “Zhongguo”? [Territory, nation, culture, and history] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2014), 57–74.


8 Zhi Lu, “Zujie li de Zhongguo ren” [Chinese people in the concession], Ta kung pao, December 12, 1931. I thank Lillian Tsay for helping me obtain this source.
In line with Thongchai’s perspective, the begonia and mulberry leaves in modern Chinese territorial narratives symbolize “not merely space or territory”: they may also become a vital “component of the life of a nation,” serving as a “source of pride, loyalty, love, passion, bias, hatred, reason, and [un]reason.”

Building upon Thongchai’s “geo-body” definitions, this article further contends that the creation and reception of the leaf trope, in both visual and textual forms, were part of a collaborative enterprise. The establishment of this enterprise involved authors, illustrators, and audiences participating in the appropriation, dissemination, and comprehension of various “intellectual resources” (思想资源 sixiang ziyuan) from both past and present—including historical allegories, cultural memories, and everyday experiences—related to warfare and territorial loss.

The fusion of intellectual resources consequently created an empathetic platform for articulation of the sense of crisis alongside patriotic sentiments. The leaf trope, by integrating historical allusions and emotions linked to “territorial losses,” offers a renewed perspective on territorial conceptualization in the 1930s.

This research explores the conceptualization of China’s territory during the 1930s, with a focus on the leaf trope in both visual and textual forms. This era saw knowledge production about territory and sovereignty inextricably tied to the promotion of patriotism and the forging of a national identity. The blending of historical allegories with the circumstances of the 1930s enhanced the resonance of the leaf trope and influenced territorial perceptions during the Nationalist period and thereafter.

The Analogy of the Begonia Leaf

Evidence from an official textbook of the late Qing suggests that the Qing’s territory had been contemporaneously compared to a leaf. A primary school textbook edited by the Qing Ministry of Education (學部 Xue bu) states: “The terrain of our country resembles a begonia leaf. The eastern part extends to the Bo Sea and is like the leaf’s stem. The western part reaches the Onion Range and is similar to the leaf’s tip. The provinces and affiliated regions together compose the entire leaf.”

This narrative, drawing a parallel between the territory and a leaf, found similar use in textbooks from the early Republican period, some of which were accompanied by illustrations.

The incorporation of illustrations in Chinese textbooks near the beginning of the twentieth century became a distinctive feature of the “modern pedagogy” that was gaining popularity in educational circles. This method, a synthesis of Western and Japanese educational approaches and China’s own pedagogical tradition, under-
scored the educational value of using images and illustrations for primary-school and middle-school students.\textsuperscript{13}

The territorial discourse featured in late Qing textbooks suggests that the visual resemblance helped establish the territory-leaf analogy as a commonly acknowledged concept. This analogy was subsequently incorporated into early Republican textbooks across a broad array of subjects to illustrate China’s territory, and its influence continued throughout the Nationalist era. A lesson titled “The Topography of a Begonia Leaf” from a 1933 primary-school social studies textbook states, “Upon observation, the entire expanse [of our country] resembles a begonia leaf.” The lesson presents students with a sequence of three questions: 1) Have you ever seen the leaves of the begonia? 2) Do you think the begonia leaf resembles the map of our country? 3) Why don’t you try drawing a begonia leaf and take a look?\textsuperscript{14} These questions, each building upon the previous one, were designed to encourage students not only to consider the correlation between a begonia leaf and the territory but also to “experience” it through the activity of observing and drawing the leaf. Additionally, the lesson pairs sketches of a leaf with that of China’s territory, a common pedagogical technique used in textbooks to accentuate the leaf-territory analogy.\textsuperscript{15}

In this regard, the fundamental premise of the leaf analogy pertains to the leaf’s physical characteristic—its shape. Under this premise, begonia and mulberry leaves were sometimes interchanged to describe the physical contours of China’s territory.\textsuperscript{16} However, beneath the facade of visual resemblance lie several layers of botanical, cultural, and historical references that further shaped the adaption and application of the leaf trope.

Leaves, as products of nature, undergo a life cycle of growth and decay. They provide sustenance for numerous species but are also inevitably susceptible to pests and plant diseases. As such, the image of withered or damaged leaves struck some as an apt metaphor for China’s territorial circumstances during the 1930s, both visually and ideologically. In a 1936 poem titled “Look at the Map,” a student author wrote, “Classmates, this is our country! On this shriveled [乾癟 ganbie] begonia leaf, our homes reside!”\textsuperscript{17} The term “shriveled” plays a critical role in this context, as it implies that the state of China’s territory, as depicted on a map, is comparable to an unhealthy begonia leaf. Functioning as a patriotic metaphor, the leaf trope could effectively evoke the image of leaves being besmeared, damaged, or bitten, symbolizing the “territorial losses” between the late Qing era and the author’s time. A similar narrative appears in a 1934 Mandarin textbook lesson titled “The Begonia Leaf Damaged by Pests” (蟲蛀的秋海棠葉 “Chong zhu de qiuhaitang ye”), which displays an image of China’s territory with black dots caused by


\textsuperscript{14} Li Qingsong, Jiang Gongsheng, Shi Zezhi, and Shi Xiaocheng, eds., \textit{Shehui keben} [Social studies textbook], vol. 4 (Shanghai: Nanjing shudian, 1933), 30–31.

\textsuperscript{15} See Yu Pu, ed., \textit{Xiaoxue dili keben} [Elementary school geography textbook], vol. 1 (1933; Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1934), 3.

\textsuperscript{16} See, for example, Liu Huru, ed., \textit{Xin shidai benguo dili jiaokeshu} [New era domestic geography textbook], vol. 1 (1927; Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1930), 1; Dong Wen and Zhang Guowei, eds., \textit{Chuzhong benguo dili} [Junior-high-school domestic geography], vol. 4 (1930; Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1931), 123.

\textsuperscript{17} Jiang Qinggeng, “Kan ditu” [Looking at the map], \textit{Nan sheng} [Southern voice] 5 (1936): 35.
pests. The text reads, “A begonia leaf, so whole and adorable; sadly, it has recently been ravaged by pests [害蟲 haichong]. Look, along the edges of the leaf, along both sides of the central vein; are there not many small black dots? These many black dots are the scars left by the pests. Originally verdant and attractive, it is now yellow and dull. If we do not eradicate these pests soon, this leaf will quickly wither.”

The intertextuality between the leaf and territory hence was founded on the narrative of a bug-eaten leaf—the essence underneath the visual similarity.

Furthermore, the plot-setting of “pests consuming leaves” prepared the stage for a more profound rhetoric that emphasized the leaf’s biological vulnerability, thereby highlighting the damaging influence of external factors. In a lesson titled “Republic of China” from the 1930 version of a social studies textbook, an image of a black-spotted begonia leaf accompanies the lesson text designed to raise awareness about the state of the territory: “The shape of our nation resembles that of a begonia leaf. This beautiful begonia leaf, unfortunately, has suffered from foreign invasions, resulting in many blemishes. We must unite and work hard to eliminate all damage, ensuring the perpetual beauty of this begonia leaf.”

The harm inflicted upon the leaf is explicitly attributed to “pests”—a metaphor for foreign forces—outlining a scenario in which China’s territory was in danger. Education during the Nationalist period witnessed the integration of such a narrative into the production and instruction of territorial knowledge. A teacher’s guide affirmed that the description of the pest-inflicted leaf was meant to stimulate children’s passion for “saving the country” by illustrating that their homeland was under attack.

These instances suggest that a “spatial vernacular,” drawing parallels between the shape of a leaf and China’s territory and comparing the damages on a leaf to foreign presences and invasions, had emerged in the early 1930s.

The leaf-pest script acquired new dimensions with the presence of Japanese forces in China, positioning Japan as the antagonist in the leaf trope. A 1928 issue of the Zhonghua Book Company’s children’s magazine, Little Friend (小朋友 Xiao pengyou) includes a fictional story of a child receiving an atlas, in which the first map—depicting the ROC—resembles a vibrant begonia leaf. However, one night as the child studies geography, he opens the atlas to discover an ink mark on Shandong Province—located near the “leaf base” of China’s territory. The clues in this story—stains, Shandong, and 1928—allude

19 The cases from textbooks discussed here, among other similar sources, also show that use of the leaf trope was not limited to the subject of geography.
20 Jiang Jingfu, ed., Xin Zhonghua shehui keben [New China social studies textbook], vol. 6 (1928; Shanghai: Xin guomin tushushe, 1930), 3–4.
21 Jiang Jingfu and Wu Guixian, eds., Xin Zhonghua changshi keben jiaoshou shu [Teacher’s guide for the New China common knowledge textbook], vol. 6 (1929; Shanghai: Xin guomin tushushe, 1930), 8.
to the Jinan incident that resulted in thousands of Chinese casualties and the Japanese occupation of Jinan until March 1929. After Japan’s 1931 seizure of Manchuria, casting Japanese forces as the pests in the leaf trope became increasingly common. In a 1933 article titled “Our Map,” the author, without directly calling out Japan, informed readers that “the northeastern edge of the leaf” had been consumed by pests and warned that the leaf would completely disappear if efforts were not intensified to eliminate the scars and remove the pests. The same narrative approach was used in Little Friend. In a 1933 issue, the editor in chief, Wu Hanyun (吳翰雲 1895–1973) accused Japan of fragmenting the “lovely leaf” (可愛的葉子 keai de yezi). The suggested remedy was to eliminate the pest; otherwise, the leaf would eventually be destroyed. In the same issue, Wu invited Li Jinghui (黎錦暉 1891–1967), a composer and a former editor in chief of Little Friend, to contribute a song titled “The Begonia Leaf Has Been Bitten Through” (秋海棠葉[被]咬破了 “Qiuhaitang ye [bei] yao po le”). The lyrics of the song call upon Chinese nationals to remove the pest and mend the fragments of the leaf.

To be sure, the incursions of Japan into Manchuria shaped the adaptations of the leaf trope. From 1931 onward, the leaf trope was employed to mirror both historical imprints of imperialism from the late Qing and the developments of the Japanese invasion. The begonia leaf, initially a literal representation of China’s territorial shape, evolved into a symbol that encapsulated both past “losses” and the ongoing crisis.

**Silkworms, the Mulberry Leaf, and Territorial Encroachment**

The depiction of the begonia leaf falling victim to pests, coupled with the analogy drawn between the pests’ behavior and the actions of the Japanese military, contributed to the discourse on territorial loss. Notably, in previous examples involving the begonia leaf, the sources of damage were typically vaguely referred to as pests without specifying the exact species. This narrative became more specific in another variation of the trope that featured the mulberry leaf. In this rendition, silkworms (蠶 can) became the destructive insects, gradually eroding the health and vitality of mulberry leaves. This raises several questions: Why were the mulberry leaf and the silkworm chosen? How did they escalate the tension between leaves and pests?

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24 Mao Youfa, “Women de ditu” [Our map], *Xin min* [New citizen], no. 45 (1933): 7.
26 The lyrics were written by Ti Fu. See Ti Fu and Jinghui [Li Jinghui], “Qiuhaitang ye yao po le,” *Xiao pengyou*, no. 533 (1933): 3–4. For discussions of the activities of Li Jinghui in the publishing industry, see Robert Culp, *The Power of Print in Modern China: Intellectuals and Industrial Publishing from the End of Empire to Maoist State Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 82–83, 106.
27 It should be noted that not every narrative involving the mulberry leaf explicitly identified the pest as a silkworm. A lesson titled “Map” from a mass literacy textbook presents an image of a leaf with veins spread throughout and small dots scattered along its margins. The accompanying text describes the map of China as a mulberry leaf gnawed at by bugs and compares the “scars”—the dots—to foreign concessions. Shen Baiying, ed., *Shizi keben* [Literacy textbook], vol. 2 (1929; Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1932), 20–21.
A Mandarin textbook lesson called “Map of National Humiliation” (國恥地圖 “Guó-chì ditu”) showcases a dialogue between two siblings. The sister draws a “map of national humiliation” and shows it to her brother, prompting a discussion about its resemblance:

“Brother! What does this map look like?” says the sister.

“It looks like a begonia leaf,” says the brother.

“No, it looks like a mulberry leaf that has been eaten by silkworms,” says the sister.

“What is the reasoning behind that?” asks the brother.

“China’s terrain originally resembled a mulberry leaf, but now the territory is no longer intact. We have lost several pieces in the Southwest, several regions have been taken away in the Northeast. Foreign forces are eroding our land day by day; is this not like a mulberry leaf that has been eaten by silkworms?” replies the sister.  

This conversation presents two interconnected interpretations for the leaf trope. The brother recognizes the visual analogy between a begonia leaf and a map of China, while the sister emphasizes the symbolic representation of territorial loss embodied by insect-eaten mulberry leaves, representing territorial crisis. This pedagogically structured dialogue is set up by a prior lesson titled “Raising Silkworms” (飼蠶 “Si can”), which educates students about mulberry leaves serving as food for silkworms. Grasping this dynamic allows students to understand the underlying implications in the siblings’ conversation, thereby intensifying the tension in the silkworm narrative. Utilizing the food chain concept, the leaf trope transforms the natural behavior of silkworms consuming mulberry leaves into a metaphor for foreign invasions.

Nevertheless, while the food chain rationale sheds light on the selection of the mulberry leaf and silkworms, it does not fully explain why this particular metaphor became a prevailing narrative representing foreign threats to China’s territory during the Nationalist period. Indeed, the employment of this metaphor was further connected to ancient silkworm tales infused with historical connotations.

Historically, economic activities centered around the mulberry and silkworms played a vital role across numerous regions in China. Attempts to domesticate silkworms occurred in the Neolithic period along the Yellow River and in the Yangzi River valley. In the Book of Odes (詩經 Shijing), dating to the Western Zhou period, the mulberry is the plant most frequently mentioned; these trees were valued for their yield of sweet berries and their leaves, which served as the primary food for silkworms. Leizu (嫘祖), the legendary wife of the Yellow Emperor, was credited in ancient texts with the invention of sericulture technology and social transformation during the Song and Yuan periods.

28 Wei Bingxin and Yin Shuping, eds., Guoyu duben jiaoxue fa [Teaching guide for Mandarin reader] (1931; Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1933), 71.
29 Wei and Yin, Guoyu duben jiaoxue fa, 67–70.
of sericulture. The worship of the “Silkworm Mother” has deep cultural and religious roots and continues to be prevalent in some regions.

Furthermore, silkworms occupy a distinctive place in ancient Chinese history. The idiom *canshi* (蠶食), meaning “silkworms eat” or “encroach,” appears in pre-Qin and Han texts such as the *Han Feizi* (韓非子) of Han Fei (韓非 ca. 280–233 BCE) and the *Historical Records* (史記 Shī jì) of Sima Qian (司馬遷 ca. 145–86 BCE). Originating in the Warring States period, *canshi* illustrated the gradual subjugation of other states by the Qin state, eventually leading to the formation of the Qin Empire. In the *Historical Records*, Sima Qian remarked, “When Zhou was declining, the Qin prospered and built their state on the western frontier. From the time of Duke Mu, it gradually encroached upon the lands of feudal lords and eventually made the First Emperor successful” (至周之衰,秦興,邑于西垂。自繆公以來,稍蠶食諸侯,竟成始皇). The idiom “*canshi*” subsequently evolved into a metaphor symbolizing relentless encroachment on territories. The slow yet persistent movement of silkworms popularized *canshi* as a representation of foreign powers that were gradually consuming China in the same manner that silkworms methodically devour a mulberry leaf. This narrative cast silkworms, traditionally symbols of economic prosperity, in a malevolent light. By merging the natural characteristics and historical references of *canshi*, the concept of encroachment was reformulated. This gave rise to the imagery of silkworms (representing external forces) consuming a mulberry leaf (symbolizing China’s territory) as a metaphorical portrayal of China’s territorial crisis.

As mentioned earlier, the choice to represent China’s territory through the begonia leaf may have stemmed largely from their alleged visual similarities. Meanwhile, the association of the mulberry leaf with silkworms, combining food-chain logic with historical allegories, highlighted the process and consequences of territorial encroachment. However, these two symbolic layers were not always separate; at times, they coexisted in a single narrative. For instance, a 1935 Mandarin textbook includes a lesson titled “Begonia Leaf” in which China’s topography is described as resembling a begonia leaf. Yet, as the narrative transitions to discuss imperialist incursions, the begonia leaf is replaced by a mulberry leaf: “Now, as four [northeastern] provinces of China have fallen, the invasion of imperialists is like silkworms eating mulberry leaves. This shame is imprinted on the hearts of 400 million people.” In another example from a 1937 middle school journal...


35 Zhou Langfeng, Jiang Pinzhen, Jin Runqing, and Zhou Shangwen, eds., *Fuxing guoyu zhidao fa* [Instruction guide for revival Mandarin textbook], vol. 8 (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1935), 123. References to “silkworms eating begonia leaves” are rare, but one textbook includes the idea: “A beautiful begonia leaf, its edges all nibbled by silkworms, displays many scratches.” Sun Xingsan, ed., *Gaozhong xin benguo dili* [New high-school domestic geography], vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1939), 13.
in Shanghai, a poem titled “Reflections on Viewing a Map” offers a patriotic portrayal: “A landscape resembles a mulberry leaf; who will fend off the wild silkworms’ eager encroachment? It is pitiful that the country’s ruin seems not far off. Pointing at this map, I shed tears and feel heartache!”

At first, the mulberry leaf is presented as similar to the landscape, echoing attributes commonly tied to the begonia leaf comparison. Yet, the narrative quickly shifts to the threat posed by the silkworms. To the poet, the mulberry leaf is not only a visual representation but also a symbol of territory at risk of encroachment.

Additionally, the visual depiction of canshi, capturing the action of silkworms consuming leaves, may have offered a more compelling means of stimulating patriotic sentiments than text alone. In the 1932 version of a Nationalist party ideology textbook (黨義課本 dangyi keben), an illustration in the lesson titled “The Loss of China’s Territory” presents four silkworms nibbling at the edges of a leaf. The accompanying teacher’s guide explicitly states that the lesson’s objective is to educate students about China’s territorial loss and inspire patriotism.

Similarly, an image titled “China’s National Humiliation” in a 1939 pictorial atlas displays the imagined historical boundaries and six silkworms crawling on the edges of a green leaf. The corresponding description elucidates the illustration’s visual design: “The area within the red line represents the China of the past, while the section shaped like a green leaf in the center symbolizes present-day China. Why has our territory diminished from large to small? It is because it has been consumed by the large silkworms from all sides!”

Although the description leaves these “large silkworms” undefined, readers of the 1930s and 1940s would likely have associated these silkworms with foreign powers, including the Japanese Empire.

The Chinese populace living through the 1930s and 1940s perceived Japan as the most formidable threat to their country. Literary and visual representations of canshi often alluded to Japan’s ambitions to occupy China. In 1915, when the Twenty-One Demands were presented by Japan, opinions had emerged suggesting that Japan had been implementing the doctrine of encroachment (蠶食主義 canshi zhuyi) against China since the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). A 1936 illustration titled “The Busy Silkworm Season,” featured in a weekly magazine, depicts three giant silkworms feasting on a leaf labeled “China” embellished with dense veins. These silkworms bear human faces with moustaches and wear glasses and army service caps, mirroring cartoon depictions of Tōjō Hideki (東條英機 1884–1948), commander of the Kwantung Army Military Police Corps in 1936. The characters on the silkworm positioned northeast of the leaf read “South Manchuria Railway” (南滿路 Nan Man lu), while the characters on the silkworm at the...
center of the image translate to “Cang–Shi Road” (滄石路 Cang Shi lu), a communication line from Cangzhou (滄州) to Shijiazhuang (石家莊) in Hebei Province. The characters on the silkworm situated southeast say “Southern expansion doctrine” (南進政策 Nan jin zhengce), commonly known as Nanshin-ron (南進論). Notably, this specific silkworm is depicted traversing the Taiwan Strait from Taiwan to China’s Fujian Province. Together, these three silkworms represent the Japanese presence in China, and the illustrator skillfully communicates to readers where these silkworms were consuming China’s territory. While the practice of dehumanizing enemies during wartime is not unique to Nationalist China, the metaphor of the silkworm as the antagonist stands out for its blend of visual resemblance, historical allusions, and the territorial crisis resulting from the Japanese invasion.42 The inextricable bond between the silkworm and the mulberry leaf was thus imprinted upon the public’s understanding of China’s situation, fostering a shared sentiment parallel to the “affective community of sense” invoked by maps.43

The discussions above demonstrate that “territorial losses”—represented in map-like illustrations of both begonia and mulberry leaves—function as what Thongchai Winichakul


43 Regarding the concept of the “affective community of sense” and the usage of historical maps to form the basis for territorial claims in contemporary China, see William A. Callahan, Sensible Politics: Visualizing International Relations (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 147–177. For a related example, in China Made, Karl Gerth presented an image from an advertisement from the early 1930s during the National Products Movement, which compares silkworms to foreign products gradually consuming the Chinese market represented by a mulberry leaf. Karl Gerth, China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 16.
has described as “semiotic manufacture,” which seems ostensibly concrete, measurable, and transmissible. It is noteworthy that, although there appeared to be a “shift” in the 1930s from the begonia leaf to the mulberry leaf in iterations of the leaf trope as war tensions mounted, the mulberry leaf did not entirely supplant the begonia leaf in later territorial narratives. During the 1930s, analogies based on both leaves coexisted in textbooks. It is also challenging to definitively state that the begonia leaf predated the mulberry leaf in early-ROC territorial narratives, especially when considering a few textbooks dating to the 1910s–1930s in which the mulberry leaf was used to represent the shape of China’s territory in a manner similar to the application of the begonia leaf. While this section highlights the mulberry leaf’s increased connotations of sovereignty in the 1930s, examples such as the shriveled and damaged begonia leaves mentioned above and the discussion in the epilogue of this article indicate that the begonia leaf could be as politically charged as the mulberry leaf. Depending on context, both leaves could serve as straightforward mnemonics to represent the shape of China’s territory or as political symbols signifying the state of China’s sovereignty.

**Visualizing “Never Forget the Northeast” and “Restore Our Territory”**

The Mukden incident of 1931 resulted in the Kwantung Army taking control of Manchuria years before the formal onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). From a twentieth-century Chinese perspective, this region was, and continues to be, known as Northeast China or the Northeast—“Dongbei” (東北). Following the establishment of Manchukuo in 1932, Chinese nationalistic narratives depicted Manchuria as emblematic of China’s military setbacks and territorial losses, painting a grim picture of a potential Japanese conquest of the country. Maps and map-related imagery, such as visuals based on the leaf-territory analogy, were commonly utilized to incite public patriotic sentiments by reflecting the situation in Manchuria. A magazine titled Black White (黑白 Hei bai) published by Shanghai Northeast Association in 1934 features a black-matrix map-like illustration of four northeastern provinces (Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, and Rehe). This image is accompanied by the characters for “never forget the Northeast” (毋忘東北 wu wang Dongbei) set in shadow outline font. Together, the text and the simplified sketch form an integrated image conveying the hope of reclaiming Manchuria. The phrase “never forget the Northeast” serves as more than just a caption; it is an integral component of the map-like visual design. In the 1930s, numerous iconographic images concerning Manchuria used comparable styles or titles, but their primary purpose was not necessarily to offer

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44 Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, 152.
45 See, for example, Xie Guan, ed., *Dili* [Geography], vol. 1 (1914; Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1921), 57; Wang Zhongqi, ed., *Chuzhong benguo dili* [Junior-high-school domestic geography], vol. 1 (1923; Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1932), 58–62. See also fn16 in this article.
46 For discussions of the historical evolution of Manchuria as a toponym for the region known as the Northeast in modern Chinese discourses, see Mark C. Elliott, “The Limits of Tartary: Manchuria in Imperial and National Geographies,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (2000): 603–46.
47 *Hei bai* [Black white] 1, no. 12 (1934): no page number. *Hei bai* might be an abbreviation of “bai shan hei shui” (the white mountain and black water), denoting Changbaishan and Heilongjiang.
WAYS OF IMAGINING THE TERRITORY IN 1930S CHINA

cartographic details. Instead, these images were designed to perpetually draw attention to the situation in Manchuria.

Whereas the phrase “never forget the Northeast” passively appealed to its audience, the slogan “restore our territory” (還我河山 huan wo heshan)—constantly visualized in the calligraphy allegedly penned by Yue Fei (岳飛 1103–1142), a renowned military commander from the Southern Song era—delivered a more active message about the ideal of reclaiming Manchuria. Throughout the Nationalist period, huan wo heshan evolved into a symbolic representation of the nation’s collective aspiration to reclaim its “lost territories.” However, despite its prevalent use, the slogan and its associated historical reference are often treated as background elements in the perception of patriotic propaganda designed for wartime China.48 There has been an insufficient exploration of its proliferation and manifestation in visual forms. Like the allegorical and visual symbolism of leaves and silkworms, huan wo heshan and its graphical depiction in print media transcended their literal interpretations. In particular, the widely disseminated huan wo heshan calligraphy, commonly viewed as Yue Fei’s handwriting, bolstered the narrative of territorial restoration following the Mukden incident.

Although the popular huan wo heshan calligraphy is often assumed to be Yue Fei’s genuine handwriting, the authenticity of this claim remains a subject of debate. Scholars have pointed out that the popular visual representation of huan wo heshan may be a patriotic invention of the Republican era. Historian and philologist Zhang Zhenglang (張政烺 1912–2005) suggested that the calligraphy first appeared in the revised 14th edition of the Political Atlas of China (中國形勢一覽圖 Zhongguo xingshi yilan tu), which was edited by geographer Tong Shiheng (童世亨 1883–1975) and published in 1919. Zhang contended that Tong, inspired by the May Fourth movement and the territories lost in Shandong Province, sought to instill patriotism among the public by incorporating the slogan into his atlas. Zhang believed that no known rubbings of huan wo heshan existed before the twentieth century.49 Adding a layer to this debate, historian Zhu Ruixi (朱瑞熙 1938–) offered a different viewpoint. He argued that, in 1931, philologist and calligrapher Zhou Chengzhong (周承忠 1878–1970) assembled all four characters of huan wo heshan from Yue Fei’s supposed calligraphic rendition of the “Eulogy on the Ancient Battlefield” (弔古戰場文 “Diao gu zhanchang wen”) originally authored by Li Hua (李華 715–766) of the Tang era. These assembled characters were subsequently added to the revised version of Tong’s Political Atlas of China.50

The broad distribution of the huan wo heshan calligraphy represents both a reinvention and an appropriation of Yue Fei’s historical image. Yue Fei, regarded as a remarkable military leader, was also revered as the embodiment of civil-military unity, primarily due

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49 Zhang Zhenglang, “Yue Fei ‘huan wo heshan’ taben bianwei” [Inquiring about the authenticity of Yue Fei’s “restore our territory” rubbing], in Zhang Zhenglang wen shi lunji [Collection of Zhang Zhenglang’s works on literature and history] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 739–40.

to his purported expertise in literature and calligraphy. More importantly, traditional Chinese historiography esteemed him a “national hero” (民族英雄 minzu yingxiong) for leading the Southern Song military against the Jin forces, transforming him into a symbol of resistance against foreign invasions. The usage of the huan wo heshan calligraphy thus deeply resonated with sentiments in the wake of the Mukden incident. Comparisons were made between the Japanese invasion of China and the Jin-Song wars that took place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Both periods were characterized by narratives of territorial loss and military challenges faced by Han Chinese regimes.

Throughout the Nationalist period, the huan wo heshan calligraphy was frequently featured in publications, serving as a popular prompt to evoke patriotic emotions among readers. The October 1931 issue of The Young Companion (良友画报 Liangyou huabao), published right around the time of Japan’s invasion of Manchuria, dedicates a full page to the display of the huan wo heshan calligraphic piece. This artwork is accompanied by the printed phrase, as well as by its English translation, “return us our territory,” in all capital letters positioned beneath the calligraphy (see Figure 2). The same issue also features a photograph of the landscape of Jilin Province, accompanied by the title “Huan wo heshan” and references to Japan’s military activities in Manchuria in the caption. The text alongside the photograph asks what the feelings of Chinese people might be while beholding the “magnificent territory” (锦绣山河 jinxiu shanhe) falling into the hands of Japan. Moreover, huan wo heshan could be integrated with other visual elements and slogans, as in one instance in which the phrase “never forget the Northeast” is positioned above a standard topographic map of Manchuria, with the huan wo heshan calligraphy imprinted at the map’s center. The visual expression that juxtaposed the huan wo heshan calligraphy and a map began to gain widespread circulation beginning in the early 1930s.


52 For the transformation of Yue Fei’s image and his portrayal as a national hero in modern China, see Sun Jiang and Huang Donglan, “Yue Fei xushu, gonggong jiyi yu guozu rentong” [Narratives of Yue Fei, collective memory, and national identity], Ershiyi shiji [Twenty-first century] 86 (2004): 88–100.

53 When confronting territorial losses during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Song literati found inspiration to express their feelings through poetry in response to maps that illustrated territorial losses. With a focus on themes of maps and territories, their poems conveyed patriotic sentiments by portraying both actual and imagined landscapes. This practice of using poetry to express emotions stimulated by observation of depictions of landscapes bears similarities to the example discussed at the beginning of this research. See Hilde De Weerdt, “Maps and Memory: Readings of Cartography in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Song China,” Imago Mundi 61, no. 2 (2009): 145–67.

54 “Huan wo heshan: Yue Fei biji” [Restore our territory: Yue Fei’s handwriting], Liangyou huabao, no. 62 (1931), frontispiece. The same image was featured in Dongfang zazhi (Eastern Miscellany) in 1934 to mark the two-year anniversary of the 1932 Shanghai incident. “Huan wo heshan” [Restore our territory], Dongfang huabao column, Dongfang zazhi 31, no. 3 (1934): 1. For the influence of Liangyou in Shanghai’s publishing and cultural realm, see Paul Pickowicz, Kuiyi Shen, and Yingjin Zhang, eds., Liangyou, Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926–1945 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

55 “Huan wo heshan” [Restore our territory], Liangyou huabao, no. 62 (1931): 1.


57 For similar examples, see “Huan wo heshan (fu Dongbei si sheng ditu)” [Restore our territory (map of the four northeastern provinces included)], Shangbao huakan [Chinese commercial news Sunday
when “restore our territory” met the trope of the leaf

In much Nationalist patriotic propaganda, the imagery of the huan wo heshan calligraphy and the canshi allegory were used in conjunction as a rallying cry to advocate resistance against the Japanese invasion. Specifically in the leaf-silkworm imagery referencing Manchuria, Japan was portrayed as the sole aggressor, symbolized by voracious silkworms consuming China’s geo-body. The huan wo heshan slogan further amplified

Figure 2. The huan wo heshan (還我河山 restore our territory) calligraphy appeared in The Young Companion (良友畫報 Liangyou huabao) after the Mukden incident. Source: “Huan wo heshan: Yue Fei biji” [Restore our territory: Yue Fei’s handwriting], Liangyou huabao, no. 62 (1931), frontispiece.

When “RESTORE OUR TERRITORY” MET THE TROPE OF THE LEAF

In much Nationalist patriotic propaganda, the imagery of the huan wo heshan calligraphy and the canshi allegory were used in conjunction as a rallying cry to advocate resistance against the Japanese invasion. Specifically in the leaf-silkworm imagery referencing Manchuria, Japan was portrayed as the sole aggressor, symbolized by voracious silkworms consuming China’s geo-body. The huan wo heshan slogan further amplified

Figure 3. The cover of the book *Huan wo heshan*, which depicts a colossal silkworm encroaching on Manchuria. Source: Shi Min, *Huan wo heshan* (Shanghai: Zhongguo ziqiang xueshe, 1933).
the tension of the leaf-silkworm dynamic by invoking the cultural memory of Yue Fei’s tale of resistance against the Jin forces.

This integration is exemplified in a 1933 book that deliberately chose *Huan wo heshan* as its title. The book’s cover features the *huan wo heshan* calligraphy as the title inscription, along with Yue Fei’s signature and seal (Figure 3). The book provides an overview of the societal, economic, political, and military situations in Manchuria under Japanese occupation, aiming to inspire unity and arouse readers’ determination to recover lost territories. In the foreword, the author highlights the cover design: “The inscription on the cover is the authentic calligraphy of Yue Fei, employed to awaken fellow countrymen to follow in his footsteps of loyalty and devotion to the nation!” Upon encountering the book, readers’ visual senses are engaged by a cover showcasing Yue Fei’s handwriting in red. Alongside this, a striking image captures attention, depicting a white silkworm encroaching on the upper right part of a green, leaf-like representation of China’s territory. The silkworm’s intrusion into the northeastern corner of the leaf, turning it black, symbolizes the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. The stark contrast between black and green creates a strong visual effect and suggests an ongoing crisis as the silkworm appears to be advancing toward the center of the leaf. The author felt obliged to compile this book to educate the public about the Japanese invasion. His aim was to foster crisis awareness among his fellow citizens and equip them with the necessary knowledge and mindset to restore lost territories.

In some cases, pro-Nationalist propaganda pieces attempted to promote the idea that the vision of reclaiming Manchuria was inherently linked to endorsing the Nationalist leadership. An example of this can be observed in the “Sketch Map of Four Northeastern Provinces,” which was published in 1933 in commemoration of the Mukden incident. This map highlights the locations of major cities and the railroads under the control of China, under the control of Japan, and jointly managed by China and the Soviet Union. Its most distinctive feature, however, is the centrally positioned red text demanding to “consolidate revolutionary forces; unify military and political power; support the brilliant leader; recover the territory of the Northeast” (*zhong zhuyi liliu minweiyu zhi zhong ming lingzhang fei marun weiyu ren*. These captions, superimposed on a map, were crafted to stimulate public support for the regime’s purported endeavor to reclaim Manchuria, without referencing the causes, process, or consequences of its loss. In this regard, the map functioned more as a conduit for conveying patriotic messages than as a tool for

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58 Shi Min, “Liyan” [Foreword], in Shi Min, *Huan wo heshan* [Restore our territory] (Shanghai: Zhongguo ziqiang xueshe, 1933), 5.
60 Franck Billé’s concept of “territorial phantom pains” offers an interesting contemporary theoretical framework for interpreting China’s territorial loss in Manchuria. However, as demonstrated in this article, discourses regarding Manchuria in the 1930s, much like the leaf trope, was grounded on layered historical, cultural, and conceptual references. See Franck Billé, “Territorial Phantom Pains (and Other Cartographic Anxieties),” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no. 1 (2014): 163–78.
61 “Dongbei si sheng lue tu” [Sketch map of four northeastern provinces], *Zhongguo geming* [Chinese revolution] 2, no. 9/10 (1933): no page number.
providing detailed geographic information. This strategy echoed the approach adopted in the *canshi* allegory, in which map-like visuals of leaves predominantly served as vehicles for disseminating patriotic messages.

The Nationalists’ narratives about “lost territories” were not merely reactions to the Japanese invasion; they also arose from the belief that the survival of the nation led by the Nationalist party depended on preserving territorial integrity. In his wartime monograph, *China’s Destiny* (*中國之命運 Zhongguo zhi mingyun*), Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石 1887–1975) argued, “There was not a single district that was not essential to the survival of the Chinese nation, and none that was not permeated by our culture.” He further contended that “the Chinese nation has lived and developed within these river basins [of the Amur River, the Yellow River, the Huai River, the Yangzi River, and the Pearl River], and there is no area that can be split up or separated from the rest, and therefore, no area that can become an independent unit.”62 This rhetoric, steeped in cultural-historical ties, was prevalent in Nationalist textbooks and propaganda materials. The intended objective of this rhetoric, which stressed the necessity of territorial integrity, was to consolidate support for the Nationalist regime’s leadership and, more specifically, for Chiang Kai-shek—the “brilliant leader” alluded to in the “Sketch Map of Four Northeastern Provinces.”

Such a narrative, aimed at fostering allegiance to Chiang Kai-shek and imbued with the rhetoric of envisioning territorial integrity, appropriated the historical image of Yue Fei, thereby generating new imagery to visualize the situation in wartime China. When the *huan wo heshan* calligraphy was juxtaposed with portraits of political figures like Chiang Kai-shek, it interwove cultural memory, patriotism, and idolization of leaders, striving to fuse historical events with the present. This adaptation is evident in the first image that follows the title page of *The Generalissimo’s Wartime Life in Pictures* (*蔣總裁戰時畫集 Jiang zongcai zhanshi huaji*), a pictorial anthology published in 1939.63 The two-page image positions the *huan wo heshan* calligraphy above a topographic representation of China’s boundaries, with a portrait of Chiang Kai-shek situated to the left (Figure 4). In the absence of a complementary caption, the *huan wo heshan* calligraphy assumes two roles in this image. It operates first as a caption, visually foregrounding the idea of restoration and protection of the landscape shown. Simultaneously, it functions as a signifier, establishing parallels between Yue Fei’s era and the challenges confronting China under the Japanese invasion. Moreover, given the propagandistic intent of this pictorial anthology, the editors might have hoped that featuring Chiang Kai-shek’s portrait alongside the illustration would motivate readers to reinforce their faith in the Nationalist leadership to resist foreign invasions and reclaim territory.


In this light, Chiang Kai-shek was subtly depicted in the image as a “national hero” like Yue Fei. Indeed, Chiang himself also employed Yue Fei as a symbol to rally unity in resisting Japanese aggression and suggested that a leader like Yue Fei was sorely needed in the face of both internal strife and external threats. On November 23, 1931, during Chiang’s closing address at the Fourth National Congress of the Nationalist Party in Nanjing, he proclaimed:

At this time of catastrophic natural disasters and people’s suffering, Japanese imperialists have invaded our land with their powerful military, ravaging our country. This is indeed the greatest calamity for our nation and the greatest humiliation for our people. If we cannot unite and work together to resist foreign aggression, the peril of our party and country lies right before us. . . . We must forge a Yue Wumu [Yue Fei] for the ROC from countless anonymous Yue Wumu figures [我們要以無數的無名岳武穆, 來造成一個中華民國的岳武穆].

These remarks were made against the backdrop of both the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the internal power struggles within the Nationalist Party at the time. See Guomin zhengfu junshi weiyuanhui zhengzhi bu [Political Department of the Military Affairs Commission of the Nationalist Government], ed., Lingxiu shi nian lai kangkan yanlun ji [Collected speeches of the leader on the War of Resistance over the past decade] (Chongqing: Qingnian shudian, 1939), 36. It is noteworthy that
While this narrative may evoke grim associations with the depiction of warfare in the famous verse “One general achieves success while numerous bones dry” (一將功成萬骨枯 yi jiang gong cheng wan gu ku) by Cao Song (曹松 ca. 830–902) of the Tang era, Chiang appeared to view himself as the ideal candidate to assume the role of a “national hero” for the ROC.

Whether in the visual featuring Chiang’s portrait and the huan wo heshan calligraphy or in the canshi imagery, there was no need to reiterate Yue Fei’s story. The distinctive, stylized handwriting and embedded historical allusions had already become an indelible part of cultural memory and political rhetoric, invoked as necessary in modern China.

**EPILOGUE**

After the Nationalist regime’s flight to Taiwan in 1949, the party-state continued to employ the huan wo heshan slogan as a daily patriotic reminder. However, the underlying connotations evolved, and the Communists replaced Japan as the adversary in Nationalist narratives of territorial loss. The slogan and its visual representations persisted, for example, in textbooks, in print media, on the walls of military facilities and patriotic decorations in Quemoy (金門; also known as Kinmen) and Matsu (馬祖) Islands, and even on a 1972 “patriotic lottery ticket” (愛國獎券 aiguo jiangquan). The lottery ticket displays the huan wo heshan calligraphy on the left, while the right side depicts a painting of Yue Fei’s mother tattooing the phrase “serve the state with utmost loyalty” (盡忠報國 jin zhong bao guo) onto his back.65 Both huan wo heshan and jin zhong bao guo were woven into twentieth-century patriotic narratives, adapting to shifting political and territorial contexts.

The year 1949 marked a critical juncture in the conceptualizations of modern China’s geo-body. The ROC on Taiwan perpetuated certain territorial analogies discussed in this article, whereas the People’s Republic of China (PRC) witnessed new developments in its territorial representations. In Taiwan, before the implementation of the “one guideline and multiple versions” (一綱多本 yi gang duo ben) textbook reform in the 1990s, the official “ministry-edited version” (部編本 bubian ben) under the Nationalist regime still depicted the ROC’s territory as a begonia leaf. This analogy, which had a profound impact on Taiwanese people’s territorial perceptions for decades, upheld the pre-1949 territorial

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65 Patriotic lottery ticket no. 626, 1972, 11.5 x 6.5cm, National Museum of Taiwan History, accessed July 28, 2023, https://collections.mnh.gov.tw/CollectionContent.aspx?a=132&no=2002.007.2079. The History of Song (Song shi) records that after his imprisonment, Yue Fei revealed to his interrogator the four characters deeply engraved into his back. However, no evidence backs the legend of Yue Fei’s mother tattooing the characters. Song shi, vol. 365 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 11393.
claim, in which Outer Mongolia was still considered part of the ROC. In contrast, the symbol of the rooster (雄鸡 xiong ji) permeates narratives about the territorial image in the PRC. However, for individuals who attended middle schools during the Nationalist period and remained on the mainland following the establishment of the PRC, the leaf trope may have held enduring influence. An individual who attended Jiangsu Provincial Yangzhou Middle School between 1927 and 1933 can still recall “the poignant metaphor of a mulberry leaf being nibbled away at the edges,” as taught by his geography teacher.

This research explores how leaves became embodiments of modern China’s territory, questioning the notion that China’s territory was considered to resemble a begonia or mulberry leaf simply because of visual similarity. The article argues that the emergence and propagation of the leaf trope is not solely a product of the purported resemblance between a leaf’s shape and China’s territory. Instead, the historical and cultural allusions and connotations encapsulated within the leaf trope, along with their reinterpretation and adaptation, played a crucial role in constructing this iconic metaphor in Nationalist China.

The examples surrounding territorial conceptualizations also illustrate the utilization of multilayered intellectual resources in crafting discourses about territory and sovereignty. From the depiction of the damaged leaf, to the canshi imagery, to the huan wo heshan slogan and calligraphy, territorial conceptualizations in Nationalist China have been intricately woven into narratives of “territorial losses.” These narratives, encompassing both the distant and the recent past, have played a pivotal role in fostering geographic patriotism. To be sure, the ideological origins and implications embedded in Nationalist China’s territorial consciousness extend beyond ephemeral territorial claims. They provide a historical lens that aligns with contemporary scenarios in which symbols and visual representations of modern China’s territory both influence and are influenced by the state’s and the public’s perceptions of territorial issues. These symbols and visual representations are instrumental in channeling patriotic emotions to mold national identity. The reinvention, appropriation, and exploitation of ways of imagining modern China’s geo-body are thus worthy of close examination.

68 Culp, Articulating Citizenship, 55.
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