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The Shandong Question: China's Search for International Partners in the Early 20th Century

Despite much of the academic discussion surrounding the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and the formation of the post-World War I world, one matter that has received less attention is the issue of the Shandong Question. Taken as a concession from China by Germany in 1898 and occupied by Japan in 1915, the Chinese emphasized the return of the Shandong Province in the years leading up to the end of World War I. However, the fledgling and politically unstable Republic of China, which was beginning to descend into the division and chaos of the Warlord Era, needed the aid of a great power to allow its interests to be voiced, eventually turning to the United States. Using memoirs of Chinese and American diplomats, diplomatic correspondence to and from the Chinese and American governments, and Chinese newspaper articles, this paper intends to examine what motivated the Chinese to seek the diplomatic aid of the United States during the Paris Peace Conference. The analysis of this matter finds that China sought the aid of the United States due to the United States' growing geopolitical position in the Pacific and rising status as a global power. Additionally, the Chinese saw ideological commonalities between the two nations and already held a relatively friendly relationship with the United States. Merging these motivations, it appears the Chinese government believed that the United States would be the most significant power that would be sympathetic to the Chinese cause.