

**LOCAL NATION, FRONTIER MANCHURIA: THE WORLD OF MULTIPLE
CULTURAL SYSTEMS AND INTELLECTUAL COLLABORATION IN
MANCHUKUO, 1900-1938**

by

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B.A., Peking University, 2010

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(History)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

April 2013

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Abstract

This thesis examines the cultural context of intellectual collaboration in the Japanese colonial state of Manchukuo (1931-1945). Reconstructing the lives and thoughts of Yuan Jinkai (1871-1947) and Zhao Xinbo (1887-1951), two prominent local Fengtian intellectuals who chose to collaborate with the Japanese in 1931, I argue that intellectual collaboration in early Manchukuo was not just a result of vested interest and moral failure, but also a product of the frontier cultural space in which the local intellectuals operated in the late Qing and Republican years.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, southern Manchuria was a temporal-spatial frontier zone where Confucianism, Fengtian localism, Chinese nationalism, and Japanese colonial cultural influence encountered and intermingled with each other. Inspired by Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology, I recognize these ideologies as overlapping cultural systems, which shared such a similar set of affective symbols as "China", "the Chinese nation" and "modernity". The purpose of this thesis is to interpret the distinctive meanings each intellectual created for these symbolic concepts in the intersection of the various frontier cultural systems and by so doing better understand their individual values, beliefs and visions: elements of intellectual life that shaped their political choices. In the fluid cultural and political environment, Yuan invented the concept of a local China of manifested Confucian Chinese-ness, while Zhao pursued the ideal of

transnational modernity, with the Chinese nation being a transient phase towards East Asian unity.

The intellectual habitus each of them constructed for themselves in their mental contact zones not only explains their courses of action in the aftermath of the Mukden incident, but also sheds new light on the intellectual developments in southern Manchuria in the decades before Manchukuo. The competition among the various forms of modern nationalism did not dominate the Manchurian intelligentsia at that time of uncertainty and transformation. Instead, such nationalisms were also co-existing and competing with many other cultural systems, local and imported. The “collaboration” among all these cultural systems created a new frontier cultural space of complexity and hybridity in Republican Manchuria.

Preface

This thesis is the original, independent, unpublished work by the author, Rui Hua.

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Acknowledgements

I offer my enduring gratitude to the faculty, staff and my fellow students at UBC, who have inspired me throughout my study and research for this thesis. I owe special thanks to Dr. Timothy Brook, my research supervisor, who has not only offered invaluable academic guidance for my work in the field of Chinese history, but also served as a role model for young historians with his meticulously researched works of incredible intellectual breadth. I would also like to thank Dr. Timothy Cheek, who has consistently offered most insightful suggestions for my research and encouraged me to pursue my intellectual goals with his humor, kindness and revolutionary spirit. Dr. Carla Nappi led me to see the flexibility and constructed-ness of such key categories in my research as China and Chinese-ness in my very first seminar at UBC. Dr. Paul Krause enlarged my vision of the history discipline by introducing me to the vast body of modern Western historiography and has always offered support, both intellectual and spiritual, for my academic endeavors in the historical frontier zone. Dr. Michel Ducharme meticulously read through the various and numerous drafts of my thesis and offered precious comments for each of them. I am fortunate to have enjoyed their guidance and support, for which I am more than grateful.

My special thanks go to my family and my friends, at UBC and around the world, without whose company and encouragement this research would have been impossible.

Chapter 1: Introduction

On September 18th, 1931, a team of Japanese Kwangtung army officers blew up a section of the South Manchurian railroad north to Shenyang city. Covering it as a Chinese plot, they then mobilized the colonial army's fearful fighting force and occupied most of Chinese Manchuria in a matter of days. This sudden incident marked a symbolic moment for the local intellectuals of Manchuria: while the Japanese asked for their service in the envisioned Manchukuo, a new state promising Confucian modernity and ethnic harmony, the bleeding Chinese nation demanded their loyalty and called for their "return". Facing the unprecedented crisis, some chose to stay on and collaborate with the enemy of the nation. Labeled soon thereafter as traitors of their country, these collaborators have until today been a group of people remembered simply as morally corrupt running dogs of Japanese imperialism. The overt condemnation of collaboration is still serving as a source of legitimacy for the current Chinese state and a cornerstone for the myth of the Chinese nation.

This materialist reductionism repeated by Chinese historians, however, has failed to illuminate the complex mental world of the collaborators –in particular the group of intellectuals among them.¹ English and Japanese works on the issue hailed from different historiographical and political contexts, but many have also focused on the

¹ See, for example, Jiang Niandong, *Weimanzhouguo Shi* [history of the bogus Manchukuo] (Changchun: Jilin Renmin Chubanshe, 1980); Zhang Fulin, *Hanjian Miwenlu* [secret stories of the collaborators] (Changchun: Jilin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1990); Xie Xueshi, *Weimanzhouguo Shi Xinbian* [New History of the Bogus Manchukuo] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1995).

political and economic dimensions of the phenomenon, attributing wide-spread collaboration in southern Manchuria to such factors as Zhang Xueliang's frustrated political reforms in the late 20s and the Qing revivalists' desire for political power.² Meanwhile, the recent pioneering studies on Chinese intellectuals in Manchuria and Manchukuo have emphasized the dominant influence of modern nationalist thinking in the region and examined the competing construction of Chinese nationalism in the Metropolitan centers of Fengtian city and Harbin.³ The concept of nationalism is a certainly critical in our understanding of Republican Manchuria, but, as I hope to show in the following pages, it does not tell the whole story. Historians have also analyzed the transnational anti-Western discourses in the Manchurian frontiers and, perhaps inappropriately, situated Manchuria in the East-West cultural confrontation that dominated the thoughts of the May Fourth cultural conservatives in China proper. The frontier intellectuals of Manchuria were operating in a different local-global cultural space, and their distinctive intellectual habitus deserve closer attention. In addition, Anglo-phone historians have also located sites of anti-colonial resistance, often in hidden literary forms, in colonial Manchukuo.⁴ The emphasis on resistance is only natural in

² See, for example, Yuko Hamaguchi, "Manshu Jihen to Chugoku Jin [The Mukden Incident and the Chinese]", in *Hogaku Kenkyu* 64 (1991): 33-76; Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth Nationalism, Resistance and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

³ See, for example, James H. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916-1932* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Occupation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); Blaine Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer: Manchuria's Russians under Chinese Rule, 1918-29* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereign and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield publishers, 2003).

⁴ In addition to Norman Smith's work cited above, recent studies of literary collaboration and resistance in Manchukuo include, among others, J. N. Agnew, "Rewriting Manchukuo: The question of Japanese

post-colonial historical studies, but as Nicholas Dirks has warned us, the romanticization of resistance may as well undermine our ability to see through the complexities in the historical grey zones.⁵

In this paper, I will go beyond the socio-political understanding of collaboration and contextualize intellectual collaboration in the cultural developments of Fengtian province in the 1920s.⁶ Using Yuan Jinkai (1871-1947) and Zhao Xinbo (1887-1951), two prominent Chinese intellectuals in early Manchukuo as examples, I will show that collaboration was just as much a result of the frontier cultural dynamics at work in a contested region, which was by no means so “Chinese” in that era of nation building and nation destruction. In the intersection of multiple cultural systems, the intellectuals of Fengtian constructed their own webs of meanings and in the process re-defined such symbolic concepts as China, the Chinese nation, and modernity. It was in this peculiar cultural space that collaboration was justified long before the inception of Manchukuo, and it is this cultural space we must seek to understand before meting out moral judgments.

literary colonialism and Chinese collaboration” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2009).

⁵ Nicholas Dirks, “introduction”, in Nicholas Dirks ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 4.

⁶ Fengtian province is the southernmost of the three provinces in Manchuria and was the political center of the region. The capital of Fengtian province bore the same name from 1912 to 1928 and 1931 to 1945. I will refer to the capital city as Fengtian city, and the province as Fengtian/Fengtian province.

Chapter 2: Clifford Geertz Revised: A Theoretical Framework

Clifford Geertz proposed the concept cultural system, or a network of meaningful symbols, as a tool for understanding the shared practices in a cultural community.⁷ A cultural system is an overarching structure of “informal rules” that informs the ways of thinking and social interaction within a community. In Geertz’s analysis, each cultural system corresponds to one fixed cultural community. In my application of the concept, however, I intend to multiply it for the study of frontier zones: there is always more than one cultural community operating in a frontier zone and as a result, an individual could simultaneously be a member of several partially overlapping communities, each operating with its own cultural system. These overlapping cultural systems would in many cases share the same set of meaningful symbols, but they could assign to such symbols radically different meanings. This then effectively makes the mind of the individual a mental contact zone, where different meanings of the same symbol confront and intermingle. However, this mental contact zone does not simply imply disorder and incoherence. On the contrary, it is a venue of creation where new meanings of old symbols are produced. Each cultural system gives the symbol a meaning that only makes sense in its own symbolic network, and the frontier individual would then have to create coherence from the distinct and usually conflicting meanings of one same symbol in his mental contact zone. In this reconciliation process, he would at times interweave old

⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1993), 3-30.

imports to create new meanings, and eventually construct a new symbolic meaning network for himself, in which the publicly accepted symbols would then contain individual meanings. One consequence of this process, which will have real implications for our protagonists in Manchuria later, is that these new meanings and the visions they bring with them are shared, if they are shared at all, only by the very few individuals at the same cultural intersection in the complex frontier world.

The cultural systems are at work not only on the popular level, where Geertz used the concept. It also works in the intelligentsia, or, to borrow a term from Thomas Bender, in the culture of intellectual life – the communities of discourse supplying public intellectuals of a society with key, legitimate problems, terms and vocabulary.⁸ The key vocabularies involved in this culture of intellectual life, such as “nation”, “local place” and “peace”, for example, would not only serve as the conceptual basis of intellectual reasoning, but also function as affective icons that lead the intellectuals and their audiences to visualized imaginations and certain courses of social action. Such iconic vocabularies could therefore also be understood, in the Geertzian sense, as a network of meaningful symbols. For Bender, such shared discursive elements indicated coherence in the 19th century American intellectual communities. In frontier zones, however, this culture of intellectual life is not just a sphere of consensus but also a venue of contestation. Where there are multiple cultural systems signifying the same symbolic

⁸ Thomas Bender, *Intellect and Public Life: Essays on the Social History of Academic Intellectuals in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 3-15.

vocabularies, the culture of intellectual life could only bear what William Sewell termed in his sympathetic criticism of Geertz as “thin coherence”⁹: the network of key vocabularies and questions offers frontier intellectuals a basis on which to communicate with each other, but these terms and vocabularies could mean radically different things for different individuals as they are hailing from the individually crafted cultural contexts in their mental contact zones.

This frontier zone culture of intellectual life creates new possibilities for intellectual activities. On the one hand, the multiple cultural systems allows intellectuals to shift freely between the conflicting cultural networks while addressing different audiences, allowing them to retain a certain level of intellectual freedom even in repressive colonial environments. On the other hand, and probably more importantly, this freedom could also empty the meaningful symbols: the symbol that in a singular cultural space contained a fixed meaning, a clear indicator of social value and public expectations, was in the mental contact zone uprooted from all its contexts and made floating signifiers. The individually remade symbols would thus lead the intellectuals to understand political choices in ways different from those outside the cultural intersection and to “naturally” deviate from the publicly accepted courses of action. The individual habitus created in the mental contact zones – the new individual beliefs, values and visions – could also cause a conundrum for the intellectuals: such values and visions differed in complex

⁹ William Sewell, “The Concept(s) of Culture”, in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 35-61.

ways from those shared by the various communities they belonged to, and they would have to constantly fight for their legitimacy and acceptance. This is not only an intellectual process of innocent cultural wanderers, but also a political process involving policy debates, power struggles, and at times life and death. Standing in their cultural intersections, they were always insiders of many cultural communities, but at the same time outsiders of all, as we are about to see in the tragic lives of Yuan Jinkai and Zhao Xinbo.

Such cultural dynamics is closely associated with the concept of the cultural middle ground, a frequently abused yet still potentially productive notion in the interpretation intellectual collaboration in Manchuria. The existence of individual symbolic universes could prevent the frontier intellectuals and their small local cultural communities from communicating effectively with the dominant communities around them, as they operate with different symbolic meaning networks. For this reason, such intellectuals needed to construct what Richard White called “middle ground”, or a cultural space of shared symbols and mutually understood vocabularies co-constructed by the colonizers and colonized for the purpose of co-existence.¹⁰ White distinguished between the space of middle ground, an enduring structural relationship based on equality of power and the will to co-exist, and the process of middle ground, which only indicates the temporary yet constant creation and exchange of shared meanings between the two parties in

¹⁰ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republic in the Great Lake Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

contact.¹¹ It is the process of middle ground construction that was present in Manchuria. The local intellectuals were constantly establishing and maintaining such constructive middle grounds, not only with foreign colonial communities, but also with such Chinese communities as the Han immigrants, Qing officials, modern technocrats, and so on. They were always trying to understand and be understood in the complex cultural and political environments. Such middle ground mentality might have been a prelude to the act of formal collaboration – which was also essentially an effort towards mutual understanding and co-existence, even though with the enemy.

¹¹ Richard White, “Creative Misunderstandings and New Understandings”, *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no.1 (Jan. 2006), 9-14.

Chapter 3: Intellectual Life in the Frontiers: Yuan Jinkai and Zhao

Xinbo

In the first decades of the 20th century, Chinese Manchuria was a frontier zone with Japanese colonial presence in the south and Russian influence in the north. It was populated by Manchus and Mongols native to the land, Han Chinese communities settling in and before the early Qing, recent Chinese immigrants flocking into the region from the late 19th century, as well as Japanese and Russian merchants, scholars and colonial agents in the city centers. After the collapse of the Qing in 1911, Zhang Zuolin, a poorly educated bandit leader from northern China, seized control of the region by force. Zhang was uncultured, but adept in the kind of power politics plaguing China in the age of warlordism. He soon consolidated his power base in Fengtian, unified Heilongjiang and Jilin, and dangled his feet in the military rivalry in northern China. After a short period of de facto presidency in Beijing in 1927, Zhang was assassinated by the Japanese Kwangtung army, his former patron, for his reluctance towards full cooperation. His son Zhang Xueliang, a modern minded Chinese nationalist, succeeded his position and pushed for rapid modernization of Manchuria's political system. He also accepted national unification under the Nationalist government in Nanjing in late 1928, before losing the whole region to the Japanese in the Mukden incident in September 1931. Behind the scenes of political rivalry in Manchuria was an effective modern

bureaucracy run by both local Fengtian elites and technocrats hired from China proper.¹²

Both Zhangs also relied on a small inner circle of advisors, which consisted of their trusted generals and local scholars.

Yuan Jinkai was an intellectual-technocrat and political advisor in the Zhang Zuolin administration.¹³ A Han bannerman by origin, he received a Confucian education in his native Liaoyang County in the 1890s.¹⁴ Having passed the county level civil service exams, he served as an instructor in the county's Confucian academy and aimed at a traditional political career. During the Russo-Japanese war from 1904 to 1905, however, Liaoyang fell into chaos and Yuan's tranquil life was disturbed. He worked with the Japanese army stationed in the county to train a local police force. His efforts were later commended by Zhao Erxun, Yuan's fellow Han bannerman who served at the time as the Qing governor of Manchuria.¹⁵ Yuan entered the Fengtian provincial political circle at that time, serving sequentially as vice chairman of the provincial consultative assembly

¹² Biographies of all officials in the Manchurian foreign office in 1916 indicate that at least half of Zhang's diplomats were born and educated in modern colleges outside Manchuria. The mixing of officials from Manchuria and China proper created an officialdom that was not Manchurian, but broadly Chinese. See Liaoning provincial archives, JC10-1-20112.

¹³ This short biography is reconstructed based on Yuan Jinkai, *Yonglu jingguo zishu* [Yonglu's autobiography], 1934; Jin Yufu, *Liaodong Sizhuan* [four biographies for people in Eastern Liaoning province], 34-42; *Dongsansheng Guanshenshi* [officials in the three Northeastern provinces], 4; Gao Pikun, *Weiman Renwu* [people in the bogus Manchukuo] (Changchun: Changchunshi Difang Shizhi Wei-yuanhui, 1988), 101-102. The precise pages, dates and places of publication of some manuscripts I read in the archives and the National Library of China are unknown or not available, which is why publication information for some primary sources in the paper is not complete.

¹⁴ Han bannermen were the Han Chinese who were registered in the Qing banner system. Most Han bannermen in Fengtian province were immigrants who moved to the region in the early Qing. They had mostly become landlords and local gentlemen by the late Qing. Liaoyang was one of the southern Manchurian counties where Han bannerman communities concentrated.

¹⁵ See Yuan Jinkai, ed., *Yonglu Shouyan* [essays in celebration of Yuan Jinkai's birthday] (Fengtian, 1928), 5-7.

under the Qing, and director of Finance, governor's secretary general, and head of the East Railroad company under Zhang Zuolin. After the Mukden incident, he chose to stay in Fengtian city and agreed to head the provincial peace maintenance committee under Japanese support. Acting against his established image as an erudite Chinese scholar always prudent in politics, Yuan had his own reputation ruined in a matter of days. He is still remembered as a pathetic traitor to his nation in the historical representations today.

Yuan's winding life trajectory would seem less self-contradictory if we take him out of the nationalist historical narrative and contextualize his intellectual aspirations in the Manchurian cultural frontiers. Yuan had since his early days in Liaoyang been entangled in a web of competing cultural systems: he was a member of the Liaoyang local Han bannermen community, a technocrat in Zhang Zuolin's modern minded regional bureaucracy, a scholar in the still vibrant Chinese Confucian academia, and a southern Manchurian local elite forced into contact with the Japanese colonizers. These four communities, each sustained by its own enclosed cultural system, supplied Yuan with different definitions for the same set of symbolic concepts such as the local, the national and the state. More importantly, they offered him different ways to conceptualize China and Chinese-ness – both affective symbols and intellectual concepts key to any Chinese thinker of the time – in a contested local place. It was in this intertwining web of contested meanings that Yuan set out to make sense of his world and imagine the Chinese nation, a nation in the making defined on his own terms.

Yuan's early Confucian education offered him the blueprint of an ideal China, a

China defined in the first place by its Confucian cultural properties. Reading the *Doctrine of the Mean* in his youth, he was trained to idealize a world order in which a benevolent Confucian king ruled his subjects in a way that “manifest the best of human nature to accommodate the mandate of heaven”.¹⁶ Yuan was determined, in his early youth, to devote himself to the promotion and preservation of this Confucian ideal. In a dedication to his scholarly studio, the cottage of tranquility and broadness in 1903, he proclaimed, “since the time when I decided to devote my life to literary studies...(I was determined) to break the darkness, consolidate the foundation of our country (*jiaguo*) and work towards nothing but its restoration”.¹⁷ Yuan’s reading of vernacular literature reinforced his devotion to this Confucian country. He was particularly fond of the *Tale of the Three Kingdoms*, a novel written during the Ming that preached the Confucian and traditional values of loyalty, personal devotion and, most importantly, national unity.¹⁸ Yuan set Zhuge Liang, a protagonist in the novel who “excelled in morality” and fought relentlessly for the unity of China as his role model.¹⁹ This symbolic figure, which Yuan constantly invoked in his later writings until the Manchukuo years, had since then been central to Yuan’s imagination of a China of grand unity and Confucian culture. In the difficult political situation of the late Qing, Yuan believed, it had only become more

¹⁶ Yuan Jinkai, *Zhongyong Jiangyi* [lectures on the Doctrine of the Mean] (1924), 2.

¹⁷ Yuan Jinkai, “Jingyuanzhai Zhen”, in *Yonglu Wencun* [collection of writings by Yuan Jinkai], vol.1 (Taizhong: Wentingge), 8.

¹⁸ Yuan Jinkai, *Yonglu jingguo zishu*, vol.1, 1.

¹⁹ Yuan Jinkai, *Yonglu riji yucun* [selected diaries of Yuan Jinkai](referred to as *diaries* hereafter), vol. 1, 20.

crucial to emphasize Confucian learning.²⁰ The Western powers were able to gain strength and wealth precisely because they exercised what Confucius had urged the Chinese to do, and the Chinese could only catch up if they “adhered to the Learning”.²¹

In his early years in Liaoyang, Yuan was convinced that this cultural China was best represented by the Qing state. He wrote to a friend in 1904 to say that “my determination to preserve the country and the race (*baoguo baozhong*) has never faded away – the late emperors of our dynasty nurtured their people with moral excellence (and I shall follow their radiant model)”.²² In this brief statement, Yuan equated the country and the race with the Qing state, which, in spite of its Manchu origins, was a state under the benevolent rule of “the sages” of “*China (zhongguo)*”.²³ When “China and the foreign powers went into conflict (*zhongwai shihe*)” during the Boxer Uprising, what Yuan resented most was that “the emperor and the empress were forced to leave their imperial residence”.²⁴ The benevolent, Confucian Qing state was also intimately connected with Yuan’s family history. Unlike many literati autobiographies that traced the author’s family history back to prominent historical figures of the remote past, Yuan only dated his family lineage back to the year when his ancestors moved to Liaoyang country from China proper to join the Han bannerman system.²⁵ It was during the Kangxi reign, the height of the Qing and the beginning of Yuan’s family memories. The national was

²⁰ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.1, 27.

²¹ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.1, 24.

²² Yuan Jinkai, “Yu Lu Binguo Xiaolian Shu”, in *Yonglu Wencun*, vol.1, 11.

²³ Yuan Jinkai, *Wangdao Genggai Yishuo* [random thoughts on the outline of the Kingly Way] (1935), 5.

²⁴ Yuan Jinkai, “Qingzeng Wenlinlang Baigong Youming Muzhiming” [epitaph for Bai Youming], in *Yonglu Wencun*, vol.1, 8.

²⁵ Yuan Jinkai, *Yonglu jingguo zishu*, vol.1, 1.

transformed herein into the personal in this literary practice.

When it came to the 1920s, a time when anti-imperialist nationalism was on the surge across the country, Yuan's idea of China saw a major shift towards modern nationalism. In 1922, Yuan was ordered to leave his local place and deal with the Soviet Russians as a board member of the East China Railroad (ECR) in Harbin. Unhappy with the "barbarous" Soviet Russians, he then traveled south to Beijing, where he cooperated with northern Chinese politicians during Zhang Zuolin's occupation of North China in 1926. During this short period of travels and participation in national politics, Yuan awakened to a new meaning of China, one that was infused with the anti-foreign nationalistic sentiments of the era of Nationalist Revolution.²⁶ He criticized Duan Qirui in his diary for hiding in the leased territories as China's prime minister, implying that he had failed to live up to the expectations of a Chinese nationalist by accepting the protection of an imperialist power.²⁷ He was then thrilled upon hearing a friend's comment that "China would have joined the rank of great nations" if he had served as a national leader.²⁸ Yuan's anti-imperialist sentiments culminated during the Sino-Soviet border conflicts in 1930, when he copied a Chinese general's last words in the battlefield in his diary with great admiration: "the nation is weak, and the Northeast is in great

²⁶ It is important to note that the discourse of anti-imperialism was not monopolized by the Nationalist party alone at the time of Northern Expedition. The Beiyang government in the north also invoked this discourse to justify its legitimacy. It was in this discursive space that Yuan came into contact with modern anti-imperialist Chinese nationalism.

²⁷ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 18.

²⁸ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 28.

danger. Wake up, my fellow countrymen, fight for a strong nation!”²⁹

However, the arrival of modern Chinese nationalism in Yuan’s mental contact zone in the 1920s did not mark the transformation of his national consciousness from culturalism to modern nationalism. The Confucian cultural system was not simply replaced by the newer and more powerful nationalist cultural system, but co-existed with it in Yuan’s spiritual world, complicating the meanings of such symbolic concepts as China and the Chinese nation. The encounter of cultural China and the anti-foreign Chinese nation were but one chain of the chemical reactions constantly going on in Yuan’s mental world. The local Liaoyang cultural system and Japanese cultural influence all acted as stimulates in the remolding of “China” and re-making of “the nation” in Yuan’s mind.

The native Liaoyang cultural system, a system infused with local Confucian gentry values, first became relevant in a time of crisis in the early 1900s. While Yuan upheld the Qing state as the core of the Confucian China he so much cherished, the Qing state betrayed him during the turmoil of 1900 and 1905. Fearing the Russian army during the Eight Power Expedition in 1900, the Qing officials abandoned their posts and escaped faster than the civilians they were supposed to protect. Like his fellow Liaoyang residents, Yuan lost some of his best friends from the local Confucian academy during the subsequent chaos and Russian atrocities. He was full of sorrow and anger when mourning for a friend who committed suicide in despair during the Russian occupation:

²⁹ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.5, 14.

“in the 26th year of Guangxu reign, war broke out between China and the foreign powers, and the Russians came to Liaoyang...the officials escaped, and the civilians were forced to run for their lives”.³⁰ This was a horrifying experience he could never forget. In 1922, he wrote, once again, that “(during the occupation), the head officials abandoned their cities, bandits emerged everywhere, and there wasn’t even one slice of peaceful land in our Fengtian province”.³¹ The desperate situation was all over again during the Russo-Japanese war, when the Qing government officially abandoned the Liaoyang region to the Russians and then to the Japanese with the excuse of neutrality. The peace and prosperity of his native place, a symbolic political goal Yuan had always valued as a Confucian gentleman, came into stark contrast with his loyalty to the Qing state.

It was under such fluid circumstances that a new concept of the country, local China, started taking shape in Yuan’s spiritual world. Appalled by the crimes of local bandits and atrocities of the Russian soldiers during the Russo-Japanese war, Yuan felt he had to do something as a learned Confucian scholar and a widely respected member of the local elite. The opportunity to take action came soon enough, but it was not to act as a glorious Qing official representing the emperor, as he had long hoped for. It was the Japanese, who recently took over the Liaoyang region, inviting him to serve as head of the local peace maintenance committee. Yuan was apparently confused by the rapidly changing situation and refused to accept the appointment at first, arguing that he “cannot violate

³⁰ Yuan Jinkai, “Qingzeng Wenlinlang Baigong Youming Muzhiming” [epitaph for Bai Youming], in *Yonglu Wencun*, vol.1, 8.

³¹ Yuan Jinkai, “Qingshou Zhongxian Dafu Houbu Zhifu Xiangshi Gangjing Xugong Muzhiming” [epitaph for Mr. Xu], in *Yonglu Wencun*, vol.2, 2-4.

the pivotal moral principle (and work for the Japanese as a Chinese subject)".³² After some communication with the Japanese officers, however, Yuan found them "rational and easy to deal with" and decided to take the offer.³³

We can get a glimpse of Yuan's thoughts about this experience because he later drafted a detailed letter to Zhao Erxun to explain what happened during Zhao's absence.³⁴ Yuan reported with pride that the ranking Japanese officer in the region, lieutenant colonel Watanabe, heard about his good reputation during an investigation of the county's political conditions, and invited him to "re-organize the local militia and re-vitalize the local society (*zhengdun xiangtuan, zhenxing shehui*)". When the state had abandoned its duties, Yuan decided to collaborate with the Japanese, for the first time in his life, to save the local "society" as a respected gentryman. Nevertheless, Yuan did not conceive of his action as treason to his country and to the Qing state that still embodied his cultural ideals. He argued that "I was anxious every day to the extent that I couldn't fall asleep... in order not to violate my principles as a *Chinese official* and not to ruin my scholarly reputation". It is ironic and critical for Yuan's self-fashioning in the later years that he only became "a Chinese official" when the actual Chinese officials had escaped, leaving his native place unattended. As a Chinese official, he was preserving livelihood in his native Liaoyang, rather than the sovereignty and integrity of China.

He further asserted his Chinese-ness during collaboration in another letter about the

³² Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.1, 29.

³³ Yuan Jinkai, *Yonglu jingguo zishu*, vol.1, 8.

³⁴ Yuan's letter to the office of the governor of the three eastern provinces dated 1905.3.26, Liaoning provincial archives, JB14-1-243.

police force he had organized during the chaos of the war.³⁵ With support from Watanabe, Yuan reformed his traditional local militia into a modern police force. Trained by a Japanese army instructor recently transferred from Taiwan, Yuan proudly announced, the new policemen had “mastered superior shooting and patrolling skills”. The Japanese origin of this local police force did not bother Yuan as self-proclaimed good Chinese official. He “promulgated rules for the policemen and frequently lectured them about (Chinese) patriotism and the need to protect our race”, while stimulating their moral conscience with Zeng Guofan’s moral teachings. The juxtaposition of Confucian moral teachings, Chinese patriotism and the sense of local duties marked Yuan’s creation of a new meaning for China – the Confucian China of local peace.

Yuan eventually linked his collaboration with heroic devotion to the Chinese nation by subtle implications in an article memorializing the local elites of the Northeast in 1928: “(since the Boxer Uprising) the local gentrymen dedicated themselves to their country with utmost loyalty. Some died for their country and left a perfect reputation; others preserved their native places and made a name of benevolence”.³⁶ With the second sentence modified by the trope of intertextuality, the text implied the shared nature of the two acts of “dying for the country” and “preserving the native place”. Both made the Confucian gentlemen a perfect reputation and both counted as “dedicating themselves to their country with utmost loyalty”. Implying that his own action during the

³⁵ Yuan Jinkai’s letter to Zhao Erxun dated Mar. 1905, Liaoning provincial archives, JB14-1-243.

³⁶ Yuan Jinkai, “Ji Dongsansheng xiangxianci xuxing shewei wen” [article in memory of the worthy men of our native place the three Eastern Provinces], in *Yonglu Wencun*, vol.3, 2-3.

Russo-Japanese war fell in this category, Yuan remolded two contradictory notions – collaborating with a foreign force to protect one’s native place and devoting oneself to the cause of his nation – into a logical whole. When the Chinese state had abandoned his native place, Yuan took up its responsibilities himself and trained a Chinese police force under Japanese support. At this point, China was disaggregated from the Chinese state and localized – China was no longer a vague political entity held together by the benevolent emperors and complex state apparatus, but the native place, the people and the local cultural customs, whose preservation Yuan strived for. This vision of a local China was affirmed by Zhao Erxun, who offered Yuan additional police equipment and a promotion into the true Chinese officialdom upon receiving his letters.

The Chinese state and the vast territories of China proper under its rule slipped further away from Yuan’s local China in the Northeast in the Republican era. With the fading of Confucian values and traditional practices in Chinese politics, Yuan felt that the country was in decay. He was losing hold of his Confucian ideal, an ideal that seemed so vague and impractical in the political atmosphere of the 1920s. The parties responsible for this moral decay were in the first place the Republican Chinese state and the Zhang Zuolin regime. He was very uneasy with the reforms the Republican state introduced in the last two decades when writing *Zhongyong Jiangyi*, a statement of his Confucian political philosophy in 1924: “those who possess the state have all of a sudden stopped revering our ancestors, abandoned the imperial rituals, and separated the humans from the mandate of heaven. This has led to the loss of the Way and is irrevocable. That is the

reason of this constant chaos!”³⁷ The state had failed to perform its duties as required by the Doctrine of the Mean, Yuan’s supreme philosophical principle, by “pursuing chaotic reforms at will”.³⁸ To make matters worse, the Nationalist state banned the sale of *Qingshigao*, the official history of the Qing that Yuan had been working on with Zhao Erxun for more than a decade in 1930, depriving him of the last connection he had with his ideal Confucian China.³⁹

The Manchurian regional government under Zhang Zuolin was not any better than the successive Republican states in Beijing and Nanjing in preserving the traditional Chinese ideal of good governance. Zhang was extracting resources from the local gentry class at will and disturbing local peace by engaging relentlessly in the political rivalries in China proper. While in political exile in Harbin in 1925, Yuan wrote in his diary that “(Zhang Zuolin) is more and more outrageous. He tortures the local gentrymen without the least of respect”.⁴⁰ Yuan also resented the Northeastern politicians’ manipulation of the symbolic phrases of “the Chinese nation” and “saving the nation”. While using the same symbols to call for peace and preservation of the people, Yuan mocked Guo Songling and Zhang Xueliang, leaders of the modernization campaign in Manchuria, for “talking in vain about strengthening the nation” only to “get themselves killed (referring to Guo’s execution after a failed coup against Zhang Zuolin in 1925) and laughed at by

³⁷ Yuan Jinkai, *Zhongyong Jiangyi*, 9.

³⁸ Yuan Jinkai, *Zhongyong Jiangyi*, 15-16.

³⁹ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.5, 13.

⁴⁰ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 9.

others”.⁴¹ Yuan believed it was he, not the nationalist politicians close to Zhang Zuolin, who truly understood Chinese-ness and the right way to save the Chinese nation.

While the Chinese state deviated from the principles of Chinese-ness, the Chinese people were also failing to match Yuan’s ideal. Since his early contact with the Russians during the Eight Power Expedition in 1900, Yuan had always conceived of the non-Confucian Russia as an Other to Confucian China. It was in witnessing the “barbarian” cultural practices and atrocities of the Russians that Yuan first strengthened the sense of superiority as a Confucian Chinese. When he served in the East China Railroad company in 1924, however, he learned with surprise that Chinese residents in Northern Manchuria were abandoning the Confucian norms of proper family relations to adopt the Russian custom of free marriage.⁴² To make matters worse, he couldn’t get along with his colleagues in the company, who advised him that his Confucian political principles of loyalty and trust were simply out of date.⁴³ Commenting on this experience ten years later, Yuan concluded that “the moral level of the common Chinese was just too far behind my own”.⁴⁴ He resigned from the company’s directorship in under a year’s time and returned to his native Fengtian province, only to witness the aftermath of Guo Songling’s military coup. The coup, led by the Beijing-educated Chinese nationalist Guo Songling, was commonly perceived at the time as an effort to bring the influence of the southern nationalists and their modernization project into Manchuria. Appalled by the

⁴¹ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.5, 7.

⁴² Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 3.

⁴³ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 8.

⁴⁴ Yuan Jinkai, *Yonglu jingguo zishu*, vol.2, 2.

damage the coup had caused to the province and people's livelihood, he cried out in his diary that the Chinese troops were "not even humans".⁴⁵ They were not even as disciplined as the Russian troops whose atrocities he had resented. The Russians, he now thought, were from a foreign country but "still humans".

Yuan also lamented that there was a lack of worthy people in the southern Chinese provinces in the early 1930s, and that the conditions there could by no means match the cultural prosperity of Fengtian province.⁴⁶ With the decline of Confucian culture among the Chinese people and the moral failure of the Republican states, Yuan's China became a distant dream, one that could only be preserved in his native Fengtian province within his intellectual and Han bannerman networks.

Having disaggregated the ideas of China and the Chinese nation from the Republican Chinese state, Yuan came back to his concept of local China in his cultural practice in the native Fengtian intellectual community. From the mid-1910s, he set out to construct the cultural authenticity of Fengtian province as a place of manifested Chinese-ness. Southern Manchuria was a frontier zone with few Han Chinese population in the early Qing. In the Republican era, it was still viewed by southern Chinese intellectuals as a region of no cultural tradition. Yuan, however, did not accept this dismissive view of his native place. He strove to demonstrate that Fengtian had a genuine cultural tradition of its own and that this cultural tradition was more Chinese

⁴⁵ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 10-11.

⁴⁶ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.6, 3.

than that of the southern Chinese, who had already lost their Confucian Chinese-ness. The intertwining of the Confucian Chinese and Fengtian local cultural systems had once again pushed Yuan towards the concept of local China, this time a local China of genuine cultural authenticity.

In 1928, the year when Zhang Xueliang decided to accept national unity under the Nationalist government, Yuan went in the opposite cultural direction and arranged with his Manchu friend Jin Liang the reprinting of *Liaodong sanjia shichao*, a volume of poems by three Fengtian literati in the early Qing. In the introduction to the volume, Yuan sought to demonstrate the existence of a Chinese literary tradition in Fengtian and its superiority in the Qing: “in the splendid reigns of Kangxi and Qianlong, there were among all the poets under heaven three elders from the Liaodong peninsula...their poems are not only based on the literary tradition of the Han and the Wei, but also a manifestation of the spirit of the *Book of Odes*. They are about the learning of life and therefore far better than those only pursuing the beauty of words.”⁴⁷ The three poets of Fengtian were therefore very Chinese in that they had internalized the best of Chinese Confucian traditions in the remote past in their literary production. The reprinting of the volume, he believed, “would lead scholars of our native place to the right literary tradition” and “mattered to the literary prosperity of Liaodong”.⁴⁸ This genuine cultural tradition of Fengtian extended beyond the realm of classic literature and encompassed

⁴⁷ Yuan Jinkai, “Liaodong sanjia shichao xu” [introduction to the poem collection of the three Liaodong poets], in *Wenlu Wencun*, vol.3, 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 3.

other fields of Confucian learning. Yuan was convinced that by “writing articles to preach Confucian morality”,⁴⁹ he was carrying on the intellectual tradition of such “literati of the eastern provinces” as Urtu Saqal, He Kegong, Fan Wensu and Li Tiejun – even though there wasn’t such a thing as “the eastern provinces” during the time when these literati were active and the Chinese-ness of Urtu Saqal, a Kitan advisor of Genghis Khan, was disputable.

Yuan also used local gazetteers as a vehicle in his construction of the Fengtian cultural tradition. He organized the republication of *Shengjing tongzhi*, the Qing gazetteer of Fengtian in 1914, and emphasized in his introductory essay that this gazetteer, sanctioned by Qianlong emperor, was “the most important in the vast body of classic literature in the eastern provinces”.⁵⁰ Its republication would help nurture the native place sentiment of the Fengtian people. Linking the local gazetteer to the image of Qianlong – Yuan’s “sage of China” – Yuan labored to connect the cultural tradition of Fengtian with the Qing state and consequently with the cultural China he championed. Jin Yufu, a Manchu Chinese historian of Liaoyang origin and a close friend of Yuan’s, worked with Yuan in the construction of cultural authenticity through gazetteers. Through meticulous research, he collected more than 150 literary works of Liaodong intellectuals in his work *Liaodong xianzheng zhushukao* [research on the works of Liaodong literati]. In the introduction to the book series *Liaohai congshu* [Liaohai

⁴⁹ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.5, 17.

⁵⁰ Documents pertaining to Yuan Jinkai’s submission of the reprinted *Shengjing tongzhi* dated 1914.11.7, Liaoning provincial archives, JC 10-1-3055.

collectanea], a collection of reprinted ancient gazetteers and literary works of the Liaodong region Jin Yufu edited, the author (who was writing to introduce Jin's work) also traced the literary tradition of his native province back to Urtu Saqal, He Kegong and the three Liaodong poets of the early Qing to argue that "it would be an insult to our ancestors to say that there wasn't a (Chinese) literary tradition in Liaodong".⁵¹

It is important to note the ethnic dimension of this constructed Fengtian Chinese cultural tradition. It was not just a Han tradition: the literati in Yuan's narrative and Jin's collections were not all Han but also included Manchus and Kitans. It was precisely this outsider perspective that allowed Yuan and Jin to claim a superior form of Chinese-ness than the Han Chinese of China proper. Yuan never expressed this thought explicitly in his surviving writings, but his political tutor and close Han bannerman friend Zhao Erxun made it clear for his community. On the eve of the 1911 revolution, Zhao dispatched a letter to the Han revolutionaries in Wuchang to warn them not to further stimulate the anti-Manchu sentiment, as it would be detrimental to the unity of China and render the revolutionaries "local thieves" who "harm our country". China's most fierce enemies, Zhao added, were not the Manchus but the foreign powers.⁵² It is possible that this letter actually came from Yuan, who was at the time Zhao's chief political advisor. Zhao (or Yuan in his voice) wouldn't have made this comment if he did not hail from the

⁵¹ "Kanke Yuanqi" [reason for reprinting], in Jin Yufu, ed., *Liaohai congshu*, vol.1 (Shenyang: Liaoshen Shushe, 1985), 1.

⁵² "Dongsansheng zongdu Zhao Eerxun ji Lan Tianwei zhi Wuchang qiyi zhujun hangao [governor of the three Eastern Provinces Zhao Erxun and Lan Tianwei's letter to the revolutionaries in Wuchang]", in No.1 Historical Archives, ed., *Qingdai dang'an shiliao congbian*, vol.8. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 5-6.

Fengtian Han bannermen community, a community that was able to transcend the Manchu-Han divide because of its in-between identity. It was from this vantage point that Zhao envisaged the Chinese nation of ethnic harmony and advised against the divisive ethno-nationalism of the revolutionaries. Perhaps as a result of Yuan's involvement in the Qizu community,⁵³ the local China Yuan constructed was also an open China that transcended ethnicity and embraced the Han, the Manchu and the Mongols.

With his own definition of China and Chinese-ness in mind, Yuan also carved out a new meaning for the symbolic phrase “saving the nation” by inverting its commonly accepted import in the frontier cultural intersection. In the 1920s, various political forces were seeking to penetrate Manchuria in the name of “saving the Chinese nation” through national unification. Yuan was determined to protect his native province, the place embodying his ideal Chinese-ness, from such threats and to truly “save the nation”. Since the early 1920s, he persistently advised Zhang Zuolin and Zhang Xueliang against engaging in warfare in China proper and suggested making Manchuria a region of neutrality. He wrote to Zhang Zuolin in 1922 to say that “the true way to save the nation lies in general Zhang's peaceful character”,⁵⁴ and advised Zhang Xueliang eight years later that it was to the interest of the Northeast to stay neutral in the central plain

⁵³ In the Republican era, Qizu was used to refer to those who belonged in the Qing to the banner system. This category included both Manchus and Han/Mongol bannermen. Yuan and Zhao both belonged to this category, though such an ethnic affiliation had different implications for them in their political lives. See Shao Dan, *Remote Homeland, Recovered Borderland* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).

⁵⁴ Yuan Jinkai's letter to Yang Yuting dated Sep. 26th, 1922, in Liaoning provincial archives, ed., *Fengxi Junfa Mixin Xuanji* (Beijing: Zhongguo Dang'an Chubanshe, 1993), 143-144.

warfare.⁵⁵ The only way to remain truly neutral, he suggested, was to exercise the moral excellence of a worthy man.⁵⁶ Those who seek to save the nation through military campaigns and modernization projects could not even “save themselves”, and “there is no other way to save the nation except for learning from the ancient sage kings”.⁵⁷ To save the nation therefore meant to practice the doctrines of Confucian pacifism and save the native place from peril. Yuan’s personal campaign to re-define “saving the nation” culminated in 1930, when the Nationalist government invited him to serve in the prestigious Supervision Yuan in Nanjing. Unwilling to dabble his feet in national politics yet unable to refuse the call to serve his nation, he sent a telegram to Yu Youren, head of the Supervision Yuan, to argue that to serve the native place and preserve local livelihood was the best way to serve the nation.⁵⁸ The various cultural systems – the local, the nationalist, the Confucian, and the ethnic – worked to produce a new set of symbolic meanings in Yuan’s mental contact zone, creating for him an individual meaning network centering on the ideas of local China and peaceful national salvation.

The Japanese colonial presence in southern Manchuria was vital to Yuan’s intellectual aspiration and political endeavors. While his fellow Chinese failed to share his values and vision, the Japanese intellectuals and colonial agents commended them. Yuan was in very good relationship with Kikuchi Teiji, the Japanese editor at large of

⁵⁵ Jin Yufu, *Liaodong Sizhuan* [four biographies of the people of Liaodong], 34-42.

⁵⁶ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.6, 13.

⁵⁷ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.6, 7.

⁵⁸ Telegrams between the Nanjing government, the Liaoning provincial government, and Yuan dated Jan.9th, and Feb.5th, 1931, Liaoning provincial archives, JC10-1-408; Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.5, 20.

Shengjing shibao, Manchuria's most influential Chinese newspaper under Japanese auspice. Yuan took Kikuchi as a "critical friend (*zhengyou*)" of China, and Kikuchi always offered support to Yuan's political agenda.⁵⁹ Although for different political reasons, they shared the vision of a closed Manchuria free from southern Chinese influence. Yuan wrote in a diary entry in 1925 that "the politics of the eastern provinces must follow the principles of protecting the borders, pacifying the people, and respecting the (Japanese) neighbor (and not to fight for national unification)".⁶⁰ Kikuchi used precisely the same phrase to make the same argument in an editorial several months later.⁶¹ In another diary entry, Yuan likened Zhang Zuolin to Zhang Juzheng, an aggressive prime minister of the late Ming who vigorously expanded state power.⁶² Kikuchi followed suit soon after.⁶³ When Yuan decided not to leave for Nanjing in 1930, Kikuchi was also the first one to lend spiritual support for Yuan's roundly criticized decision, suggesting that "any one can leave Manchuria, but not Yuan Jinkai. He is critical for the preservation of local order".⁶⁴ Even though it was unclear whether Yuan was fully aware of Japan's colonial ambitions in Manchuria, he took Kikuchi as a critical source of support for his political blueprint of a neutral Manchuria.

Yuan also looked up to Japan for support for his cultural ideals. He considered Japan a role model in preserving its Confucian national essence while achieving national

⁵⁹ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.5, 18.

⁶⁰ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 8.

⁶¹ Kikuchi Teiji, "baojing anmin [protect the borders and pacify the people]", *Shengjing shibao*, August 28, 1926.

⁶² Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 9.

⁶³ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 12.

⁶⁴ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.5, 21.

restoration. Moreover, when the Chinese were busy getting rid of their traditional cultural practices, the Japanese were preserving and developing them. Classic calligraphy, a key symbol of Chinese-ness in imperial China, was a perfect example: Yuan commented with a sense of irony that in the post-1911 era of chaos, Chinese calligraphy “is awkward and fragmented”, and “the Japanese are far better at it”.⁶⁵ This sentiment was reinforced by Yuan’s communication with the well cultured Japanese. Akatsuka Chosuke, the Japanese consul general in Fengtian province, told Yuan that classic Chinese art was valued in both Japan and Europe.⁶⁶ Yuan was flattered, but then turned to lament the loss of respect for the same art in China itself. When Japan had surpassed China in preserving and promoting Chinese cultural traditions, it became even more complicated what China was and where the ideal cultural China was to be found.

Yuan’s unique conceptualization of such symbolic concepts as China, Chinese-ness and the Chinese nation, together with his ambivalent relationship with the Chinese state, could explain his ambiguous action in the immediate aftermath of the Mukden incident in September 1931. He refused to flee with his nationalist friends to China proper, yet contrary to the common Chinese perception at the time, he also refused to push for the independence of Manchuria under Japanese support. His collaboration with the enemy as head of the Fengtian provincial peace maintenance committee was premised on the condition that Manchuria remained part of China – the China under the Nationalist state.

⁶⁵ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 29.

⁶⁶ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4, 24.

On September 24th, Yuan decided to step up and take up his duties as “a Confucian gentleman”.⁶⁷ Defending himself in his autobiography, he explained that he accepted the Japanese invitation because “the police and military have escaped, the government is non-existent, shops closed, finance suspended, bandits emerging, and the people extremely afraid”.⁶⁸ Uneasy with the word that he was working with the Japanese military to seek Manchuria independence, he sent a circular around the nation on October 7th indicating that he had no intentions of organizing an independent government for the region.⁶⁹ Another public announcement was issued on the 21st to stress that the local peace maintenance committee was a temporary arrangement and shall be dissolved as soon as the situation calmed down.⁷⁰ Zhang Xueliang, who had remained in Beijing during the incident, appeared to be on Yuan’s side in early October. In a press conference on October 5th, he told foreign journalists that “the Japanese should be solely responsible for the independence movement. The local dignitaries involved are mostly my friends. I have full confidence in their loyalty”.⁷¹ Sixty years later, he still did not include Yuan in the traitors he resented in his oral memoir.⁷² Jin Yufu, who stayed in Fengtian together with Yuan after the incident but fled to Shanghai

⁶⁷ Yuan Jinkai, *Yonglu jingguo zishu*, vol.2, 10.

⁶⁸ Ibid.,10.

⁶⁹ “defang weichihui weiyuanzhang Yuan Jinkai, benren tongdian quanguo, shenming wu zuzhizhengfu yi [director of the peace maintenance committee Yuan Jinkai declare today that he has no intention for independent government]”, *Shijie ribao*, October 10, 1931.

⁷⁰ “Yuan Jinkai dengren zibian, feizuzhengfu yifei duli [Yuan Jinkai defends himself: no independence, no separate government]”, *Shijie ribao*, October 21, 1931.

⁷¹ “Zhang yu waijizhe jieli bimian zhanshi [Zhang Xueliang talks to foreign press: avoid war at all costs]”, *Shijie ribao*, October 5, 1931.

⁷² See Tang Degang, *Zhang xueliang koushu lishi* [oral history of Zhang Xueliang] (Beijing: Zhongguo Dang’an Chubanshe, 2007).

two years later, commented in his biography for Yuan that he was “trying to resolve the crisis”. The fatal mistake Yuan made was not the choice to stay on and maintain local order, but his later decision to accept Puyi’s appointment to an honorary position in the Manchukuo imperial household.⁷³

The public in Fengtian city were not hostile to Yuan’s committee in the first days after the incident either. In a proclamation issued by a popular anti-Japanese organization in Fengtian on October 19th, the authors affirmed that Yuan’s action did have positive effects on local security.⁷⁴ They warned Yuan, however, that he should not fall into the Japanese trap of Manchurian independence. Later developments on the Japanese side proved that their confidence was not misplaced: Yamamuro Shin’ichi’s research based on Japanese archival sources indicates that the Kwangtung army decided to remove Yuan from the committee in early November due to his reluctance to offer full cooperation.⁷⁵

Interestingly, the common belief that Yuan was behind the plot to separate Manchuria from China was a product of Sino-Japanese “collaboration”. One source of this rumor was apparently an article in *Asahi shimbun* on October 3rd, which reported that Yuan was pushing hard for an independent, republican Manchuria and resisting the idea of a Manchurian monarchy.⁷⁶ This was obviously a fabricated story, as Yuan had

⁷³ Jin Yufu, *Liaodong sizhuan*, 34-42.

⁷⁴ “Dongsheng zishijun jinggao Yuan Jinkai dengren wuchong maiguo zhishou han” [the army for the autonomy of the Eastern provinces warns Yuan Jinkai not to serve as a traitor of the nation], in *Jiuyiban Dang’an Shiliao Jingbian* [selected archival documents pertaining to the Mukden incident], Liaoning provincial archives, ed. (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1991), 555.

⁷⁵ Yamamuro Shinichi, *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

⁷⁶ “Kyowa, teisei no ryoha, tan nakumo tairitsu” [republic or monarchy: sharp conflicts], *Asahi shimbun*, October 3, 1931.

been a Qing loyalist since his early days and could by no means have fought for liberal republicanism. A couple of days later, however, rumor went wild in Beijing and Shanghai that Yuan had reached a secret agreement with the Japanese to establish an independent Manchukuo.⁷⁷ By 1932, when Yuan had actually lost most of his political influence in Manchukuo, his name had become a synonym for “hanjian”, or traitor to the Chinese nation, in the Shanghai press, and was listed in the Japanese publications in Manchukuo among the founding fathers of the new state.⁷⁸

Yuan’s ambiguous political choice could be best explained by his intellectual habitus, in which “saving the nation” had been reconfigured to mean protecting the local place. He was suspicious of the Nationalist state in Nanjing, convinced that the southern revolutionaries had lost their pure Chinese-ness due to their mistreatment of the Confucian traditions. However, this local place Yuan wished to protect was worth preserving precisely because it was Chinese: the local cultural tradition and the people were cornerstones of Yuan’s China, and it was this local China that Yuan was unable to leave behind. He therefore followed the same political logic in 1905 and 1931: when the Chinese state had abandoned this local place of Chinese-ness, it was his responsibility as a Confucian gentleman to act in the state’s place as a “Chinese official”. It is a popular

⁷⁷ See, for example, “Dongbei jiaozhiyuanhui fachutongdian furen dongbei feifazhengfu” [the faculty society of the Northeastern University denies the legitimacy of the illegal Northeastern government], *Shijie ribao*, October 8, 1931; “Yuan Jinkai deng yuri siding miyue”, *Shijie ribao*, October 10, 1931; “XXX qianze Yuan Jinkai zuo riben qinluezhe zougou han” [XXX denounces Yuan for being a running dog of the Japanese invaders], in *Jiuyiban Dang’an Shiliao Jingbian*, 560.

⁷⁸ See, for example, “Shanghai de Yuan Jinkai chuxianle ma? [Has the Yuan Jinkai in Shanghai appeared yet?], *Minzhong sanrikan* [a three-day newspaper of the masses], no.1 (1932), 2-4. The author of this article directly used Yuan Jinkai’s name to replace the term “hanjian”.

argument that Yuan collaborated to regain the political influence that he had lost in the Zhang Xueliang government. This is a misreading of the political conditions in the Northeast in the years before the Mukden incident. Although Zhang didn't share Yuan's Confucian ideals, he respected Yuan as a local elder and entrusted Yuan with the authority to handle routine political affairs for him during his absence.⁷⁹ Yuan was also the first to address the crowds after Zhang Xueliang on two symbolic occasions – the commencements of the Northeastern military academy and the Northeastern University – in 1930.⁸⁰ Japanese observers too commended Yuan as one of the most influential local elders and power brokers in the region in 1928.⁸¹ Yuan did not collaborate only to regain his influence, and Zhang's respect for him could actually account in part for his rejection to Manchurian independence. He might have hoped for Zhang's return, as the Qing officials did in 1905, but Zhang was gone from Manchuria forever, taking with him the Chinese nation.

Before concluding the discussion about Yuan's intellectual beliefs, it would be worthwhile to take a brief look at Yuan's political philosophy – the philosophy of the Kingly Way. It was not only the cornerstone of Yuan's philosophical thinking about China and Chinese-ness, but also a product and instrument in Yuan's maneuvers in the world of multiple cultural systems.

⁷⁹ “Zhang Xueliang fanshen wuqi, Yuan Jinkai fuze richang zhengwu” [Zhang Xueliang not returning to Shenyang, Yuan Jinkai handles daily administrative affairs], *Shijie ribao*, July 28, 1930.

⁸⁰ “Dongbei daxue juxing biyeshi shengkuang” [the graduation ceremony of the Northeastern University], *Shijie ribao*, July 5, 1930; “Dongbei jiangwutang juban dishiqi xueyuan biyedianli shengkuang” [the graduation ceremony of the Northeastern military academy], *Shijie ribao*, September 15, 1930.

⁸¹ “Tosansho no chian ijini, choro En Kingai shutsuba ka?” [will Yuan Jinkai, an elder in the Northeast, step up for order maintenance?], *Asahi shimbun*, June 15, 1928.

Although commonly regarded as a Japanese invention for the sole purpose of propaganda in Manchukuo, the idea of the Kingly Way was present in Yuan's ideal of cultural China long before Manchukuo. It was first invoked as a criticism for domestic Chinese politics and a remedy for the excessively bitter political rivalry among the warlords. Nevertheless, his conception of the Kingly Way took a subtle turn in the early Manchukuo years from a criticism against the Chinese state to an ambiguous form of resistance against the colonial regime. This transition betrays in an interesting way Yuan's unexpressed thoughts during the Manchukuo years, a time when the formerly legitimate cultural systems were suppressed by the colonial regime yet still well alive in a collaborating intellectual's spiritual world.

In *Zhongyong jiangyi* [lectures on the Doctrine of the Mean], Yuan's manifesto of Confucian philosophy, he presented an explication of the Doctrine of the Kingly Way.⁸² Yuan believed the supreme principle of Confucianism was the Doctrine of the Mean. The Doctrine expected the worthy people to perfect themselves and conform to the Way of Heaven. To achieve this ultimate goal, one must follow the natural order of things and carefully observe the accepted social hierarchy. The Kingly Way, which was central to the Doctrine, was the political practice of the Mean. It was a direct product of human nature that a ruler must follow: "the Kingly Way originates from human nature. If one can determine his action based on his good nature, and to deliver verdicts without

⁸² Yuan Jinkai, *Zhongyong Jiangyi*, 1-18.

prejudices and biases, he will achieve the Mean and nurture virtue”.⁸³ Yuan believed the Confucian idea of the Kingly Way was best expressed in the chapter *Aigong wenzheng* in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, which urged the ruler to cultivate their virtue, trust their worthy ministers and properly rule the people. The politics of the Kingly Way (*wang*) was contrasted against the politics of the Hegemon (*ba*), which referred to the kind of politics that placed undue emphasis on “power and political tactics” and “instrumentalism” instead of “proper rituals, virtuous institutions and culture”.⁸⁴

Yuan deployed this idea of the Kingly Way primarily as a criticism for the current state of affairs in China, as he then attributed the chaotic situation in the country to the state’s negligence of the Kingly Way. The Kingly Way also served as a criterion of criticism in local Fengtian politics. In a diary entry in early 1925, Yuan used the idea to criticize Zhang Zuolin’s recent political move: “those who rely on their teachers can practice the Kingly Way, those who rely on their friends can practice the Way of the Hegemon, and those who rely on their subordinates will fail”.⁸⁵ Early 1925 was a time when Zhang Zuolin relied heavily on his modern minded nationalist advisors such as Yang Yuting, Guo Songling and Zhang Xueliang in his modern military and political reforms. Yuan’s subtle statement thus implied criticism of Zhang’s aggressive reforms and national ambition as well as his negligence of Fengtian people’s livelihood.

Yuan’s idea of the Kingly Way was in contrast with the concept of the Kingly Way

⁸³ *ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 15-16.

⁸⁵ Yuan Jinkai, *diaries*, vol.4.7.

in the Japanese intelligentsia of the 1920s. Yasuoka Masahiro (1898-1983), a Japanese Confucian thinker, was a master mind behind the Japanese discourse of the Kingly Way.⁸⁶ Although borrowing the idea of the Kingly Way from the works of Wang Yangming, Yasuoka argued that his Kingly Way had already internalized all Chinese elements and was thus purely Japanese in nature. The idea was designed as a solution for the social problems of Taisho Japan caused by Western influence and hinged on the moral leadership of the Japanese elite. Yasuoka believed that this Kingly Way could transcend the boundaries of Japan and shine over the entire Asia, yet this would only become possible when Japan rose as the leader of Asia – by military force if necessary. Embedded in this Japanese concept of the Kingly Way were the belief in anti-Western Pan-Asianism and the conviction in Japan's cultural superiority among its Asian neighbors. These were key elements of the Japanese Asianist ideology that were conspicuously absent in Yuan's Chinese version of the Kingly Way. Whereas Yasuoka saw the need for imperialist expansion in the practice of his Kingly Way, Yuan used the same idea to urge Zhang Zuolin to care for his own people and abandon national ambitions. Although Yuan was also convinced that the Kingly Way “will radiate from China to foreign countries” and “be practiced throughout the globe”⁸⁷, he never accepted military invasion as a way to achieve this goal. Hailing from two diverging cultural

⁸⁶ The following summary of Yasuoka Masahiro's concept of the Kingly Way is based on Roger Brown's research. See Roger Brown, “Visions of a virtuous manifest destiny: Yasuoka Masahiro and Japan's Kingly Way”, in *Pan-Asianism in Japanese History*, Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 133-150.

⁸⁷ Yuan Jinkai, *Zhongyong Jiangyi*, 16-17.

contexts, the two discourses of the Kingly Way held opposite political implications.

In the early Manchukuo era, however, Yuan's idea of the Kingly Way became a criticism against Japanese colonialism. When the Japanese ideologues presented the Kingly Way as an East Asian symbol of prosperity with joint Chinese and Japanese origins, Yuan labored to emphasize the Chinese-ness of the concept. He argued that the Kingly Way was the Way of Confucius, the sound name of whom should "radiate in China" before reaching the rest of the world.⁸⁸ The best example of virtuous kings of the Kingly Way in history was the Kangxi emperor. Yuan specifically noted that Kangxi was "the sage of China" that Gu Yanwu, a Chinese intellectual of the late Ming who developed Han Chinese ethno-nationalism, prophesied three decades earlier.⁸⁹ Zhuge Liang was also a good example of the Kingly Way, and what was remarkable about him was that he almost succeeded in "unifying China" and "revitalizing the Confucian rituals".⁹⁰

Having situated the Kingly Way in an exclusively Chinese intellectual lineage, Yuan then criticized the Japanese colonizers in a subtle manner for exploiting the local people. In the chapter "nurturing the people", Yuan argued, in an unusually polemical tone, that the core of the Kingly Way was to protect the people: "(the rulers) claim to be practicing the Kingly Way, but don't even care about the livelihood of the people. Is there such a

⁸⁸ Yuan Jinkai, *Wangdao Genggai Yishuo*, 2-3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

Kingly Way?”⁹¹ He also implied his dissatisfaction with the dominance of Japanese ministers in the cabinet: “if the emperor has no qualified ministers, it is a shame for those advising him”.⁹²

Zheng Xiaoxu, the first prime minister of Manchukuo and a fervent promoter of the Kingly Way in the early 1930s, raised an even more fierce criticism along similar lines against the Japanese colonizers in his last speech about the Kingly Way in 1938. He argued forcefully that the Kingly Way was the Way to save the people from the exploitation of the state. A top agent of state power, he nevertheless insisted that “people should come first, the state second. We should never exploit our people for the glory of the state...the Kingly Way is nothing else but this human nature.”⁹³ The Japanese colonial agents, who were doing nothing but exploiting the Chinese people in Manchukuo in the late 1930s to support their war efforts in China proper, were thus by implication petty people who had lost their “human nature”.

The shifting meaning of Yuan’s and Zheng’s concept of the Kingly Way was yet another example of the workings of the multiple cultural systems. China and the state were floating symbols with multiple, unfixed imports in their mental contact zones. Although he constructed a local form of Chinese-ness in the 1920s, Yuan went back to the China as a territorial entity and cultural whole in his Manchukuo writings. It was this elasticity of these symbols that allowed Yuan to shift back and forth between the

⁹¹ Ibid., 4.

⁹² Ibid., 4.

⁹³ Zheng Xiaoxu, *Sukangong Zuihou Yigao* (1938).

officially sanctioned and illegitimate cultural systems in Manchukuo to create the possibility of collaborationist resistance in the stifling intellectual atmosphere.

The intellectual collaborators in Manchukuo were not all conservative Confucian scholars like Yuan Jinkai, who chose to collaborate with the Japanese to guard a local Chinese tradition. Some made the choice in pursuit of transnational modernity. Zhao Xinbo, a Japan-educated legal scholar, is an example to the point.⁹⁴ A Manchu who spent his early years in Wanping, Dalian and Tianjin, Zhao traveled to Japan to study law at Meiji University in 1921. Graduating in 1925 with a dissertation on the legal concept of negligence, he became the very first Chinese national to earn a doctorate in legal studies from a Japanese university. Zhao returned to Manchuria to serve as Zhang Zuolin's legal advisor in 1926. Realizing the backwardness of Manchuria's legal system, he organized the Northeastern Association of Legal Studies a year later to promote legal modernization and push for the abolition of Japan's right of extraterritoriality in Manchuria. While publishing essays on his journal *Faxue xinbao* (also known as the *Legal News*), he also acted as Zhang Zuolin's Japan hand, assisting him in his negotiations with the Japanese government and colonial officials in Fengtian province. Zhao seemed very nationalistic in his essays when he argued against Japan's right of

⁹⁴ See Gao Pikun, *ibid.*, 99; Manzhou Baoshe, ed., *Dongbei Renwuzhi* [biographies of people in the Northeast] (1931), 93; Norikazu Himeno, *Manshu oyobi Chugoku no Yojin wo Kataru Sosho Cho Kinpaku Shi wo Kataru* [important Chinese figures in Manchukuo: about Zhao Xinbo] (Tokyo: Nisshi Mondai Kenkyukai, 1936). Zhang Xiaowen, "Manzhouguo de Chanpo Zhao Xinbo [Zhao Xinbo, the nurse for Manchukuo]", *Lantai Shijie*, no.10 (1997): 38-40.

extraterritoriality, but decided to serve in the collaborationist regime with little hesitation after the Mukden incident. He served sequentially as the mayor of Fengtian city and head of the Manchukuo legislature, before being expelled from Manchukuo in 1933 by the Japanese due to his insistence on liberal republicanism.

Varying in their political philosophies, Yuan and Zhao nevertheless shared something in common: they were both intellectual-politicians at the high end of social hierarchy. Whereas the common people had no choice but to work with the occupier for survival under contingent circumstances, they could have chosen to leave with dignity, as their colleagues Jin Yufu and Zhao Quantian did. What made them stay were their values and beliefs, both intellectual and political, which derived from their individual webs of meanings in their own cultural intersections. They hailed from radically different intellectual backgrounds, but were both captives in the frontier world of multiple cultural systems, a world that offered them a myriad of meanings for the same symbolic concepts and forced them to improvise for coherence in their mental contact zones.

Indeed, Zhao was a man of the frontiers: he was a Manchu born in northern China, spent most of his youth in Dalian under Japanese colonial rule, married a Japanese wife, studied in Tokyo, yet then came back to pursue the cause of modernity in China – his supposed motherland. He was entangled in a myriad of cultural communities: the community of Chinese officials under Zhang Zuolin, the Sino-Japanese intellectual community of legal scholars, the circle of anti-imperialist Chinese nationalists in

Fengtian city, and the shrinking community of Manchu elites. These communities dragged him towards different conceptions of the Chinese nation, East Asia, and modernity, forcing him to create his own web of meanings at their intersection. For him, the Chinese nation was a source of intellectual legitimacy but, at the same time, a merely transient stage in his pursuit of global legal modernity, a symbolic concept whose meaning was also contested in the Fengtian intelligentsia.

In the late 1920s, Zhao presented himself to his Chinese audience as a nationalist Chinese working for the benefit of the Chinese nation. He announced in a speech delivered to a Chinese audience in Tokyo in May 1927 that he was “a northern scholar who cared about national issues” and that he hoped for “the unification of the north and the south”.⁹⁵ Two months later, he proclaimed in Beijing that the campaign to abolish unequal treaties was a campaign to “satisfy the fervent desire of the whole nation and all Chinese people”.⁹⁶ When commenting on Zhang Zuolin’s negotiations with the Japanese on the Manchuria-Mongolia issue later that year, he was firm that Zhang’s diplomacy “will never ever undermine China’s national rights”.⁹⁷ To demonstrate his strong sense of nationalism, Zhao even managed to have his journal the *Legal News* printed in the same press that published *Dongsansheng Minbao* [people’s newspaper of the three Eastern Provinces], the most nationalistic newspaper of the Northeast under Nationalist

⁹⁵ “Zhao Xinbo zai riben zhi tanhua [Zhao Xinbo’s talk in Japan]”, *Shijie ribao*, May 29, 1927.

⁹⁶ “Zhao Xinbo furi zhi renwu [the mission of Zhao Xinbo on his visit to Japan]”, *Shijie ribao*, May 19, 1927.

⁹⁷ “Zhao Xinbo tanhua: Manmeng jiaoshe buzhi shibai [Zhao Xinbo’s talk: Manchuria-Mongolia negotiations shall not fail]”, *Shijie ribao*, October 24, 1927.

auspice in the 1920s.

However, what was this Chinese nation that Zhao was so eagerly fighting for? Zhao envisioned a “new” Chinese nation of liberal modernity and peaceful progressivism. In the opening words of the first issue of the *Legal News*, which was published on the 16th national day of the Republic, Zhao declared that he would fight with his comrades for “a new era” of the Republic, an era in which the newly born Republic would grow stronger with a dose of modernity.⁹⁸ This national modernity, Zhao believed, hinged upon the development of a modern legal system. This was by no means a new suggestion in the late 1920s, yet Zhao brought the idea of liberty into the discussion of legal modernization. He argued that the law “is for the sole purpose of ensuring co-existence”, and “should be based on the principle of freedom”.⁹⁹ Contrary to the view of the Nationalist authorities in Nanjing, which conceived of the legal system as an instrument of order and social integration, Zhao contended that laws were not created for punishment but only as a negative guarantee of social liberty. It was not a vehicle of the revolution and wartime mobilization, but a pedagogical social institution that fell in the same category with religion and morality.¹⁰⁰ Members of the law enforcement agency must seek not to arrest and punish criminals, but help reform their soul with merciful verdicts and moral education. Zhao also hoped for the democratization of the judicial system, and set what he termed as “people’s legal trials” in Weimer Germany as an ideal

⁹⁸ Zhao Xinbo, “fakanci [opening words]”, *Faxue xinbao*, no.1 (1927): 1-2.

⁹⁹ Zhao Xinbo, “fakanci”, *Faxue xinbao*, no.1 (1927): 1-2.

¹⁰⁰ Zhao Xinbo, “falv de gainian [the concept of law]”, *Faxue xinbao*, no.1 (1927): 13-15.

model.¹⁰¹

When China had established this modern liberal legal system, Zhao hoped, the great powers would willingly follow the consensus of the Washington conference and abolish the unequal treaties. Only then would a “new China” emerge, a China free from the “humiliation” of the old colonial system.¹⁰² Zhao was also convinced that this legal ideal could only be realized through peaceful progressivism: in another speech in 1927, he urged his compatriots “to destroy (the old) only to the point that such destruction is necessary for future construction”. To push for rapid social change and national unification by force (as the southern revolutionaries were seeking to do) was to cause further chaos in the country, and “those who advocate gradual reforms have found the right way”.¹⁰³

Zhao’s signification of the Chinese nation and legal modernity also had an interesting transnational dimension, which he developed within the Sino-Japanese community of modern legal scholars. Zhao believed that the purpose for abolishing the right of extraterritoriality in China was not to drive the great powers away from China, as the anti-imperialist discourse among the Nationalists demanded, but to achieve true East Asian unity. In a speech to the Japanese audience in Tokyo in 1927, Zhao criticized the Japanese for misunderstanding East Asian unity as “economic co-prosperity”, and

¹⁰¹ Zhao Xinbo, “fakanci”, *Faxue xinbao*, no.1 (1927): 1-2.

¹⁰² “Benhui zhaodai zhongri jizhe cangan fayuan jianyu shi [records of the Chinese and Japanese press tour to the courts and prisons organized by our association]”, *Faxue xinbao*, no.115 (1930):11-15.

¹⁰³ “Zhao Xinbo zai riben zhi tanhua [Zhao Xinbo’s talk in Japan]”, *Shijie ribao*, May 29, 1927.

argued for true East Asian integration through the abolition of the unequal treaties.¹⁰⁴ Such unequal treaties, Zhao reasoned, was the only cause of anti-Japanese nationalism in China, and their abolition would therefore lead to “eternal peace in East Asia” and “true East Asian co-existence and co-prosperity”.¹⁰⁵ This was not just Zhao’s convenient rhetoric to satisfy his Japanese patrons, as he made the same point clear in a speech to the Chinese audience in Beijing two months later: China and Japan were natural friends due to their cultural and geographical affinity, and the abolition of the unequal treaties would help realize “the unity of East Asia the Japanese have been preaching for”.¹⁰⁶ The abolition of the unequal treaties and the creation of a new Chinese nation was thus just the first step towards a greater goal – the regional unity of East Asia.

Unlike Sun Yat-sen’s Pan-Asianism, in which the assistance from Japan was only instrumental for the construction of a republican Chinese nation, Zhao’s desire for East Asian unity was rooted in his hearty admiration of the global modernity Japan represented. Japan was first of all the role model of modern democratic politics. After observing the Japanese general election in Tokyo in March 1928, Zhao told the Chinese press in Beijing that “the Japanese people’s political consciousness has developed to the highest point”.¹⁰⁷ They cared about politics and attended political speeches, whereas the Chinese were numb and individualistic. This observation of democratic politics in Japan

¹⁰⁴ Zhao Xinbo, “Jinggao Riben Guomin: Zhongri Qinshan yu Bupingdeng Tiaoyue [a note to the Japanese citizens: Sino-Japanese friendship and the unequal treaties]”, *Faxue xinbao*, no.3 (1927): 22-23.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ “Zhao Xinbo zuori yanjiang, xiwang nuli shouhui zhiwai faquan [Zhao Xinbo delivering a speech yesterday, wishes to push for the abolition of unequal treaties]”, *Shijie ribao*, July 18, 1927.

¹⁰⁷ “Zhao Xinbo tan riben zongxuan qingxing [Zhao Xinbo talks about the Japanese general election]”, *Shijie ribao*, March 2, 1928.

echoes Zhao's earlier discussion of Weimer Germany, where people, not the state, played the decisive role in judicial trials. Zhao continued to urge China to befriend Japan so as to rise from its backwardness and join the modern world. Japan was also the source of inspiration for Zhao's legal reforms: "law is the supreme authority in Japan", which even the emperor was unwilling to violate.¹⁰⁸ The independent rule of law, Zhao argued, was what elevated Japan to the ranks of the modern great powers. Although this was an obvious misrepresentation of Japanese politics on the eve of the Showa economic crisis, Zhao invented an ideal Japan as his model for future East Asia. The Chinese youth should also learn the modern Japanese sport spirit, another widely accepted symbol of modernity, which Zhao told the students of the Republican University "would greatly increase the wisdom of our youth".¹⁰⁹ Re-inventing the image of Japan as a symbol of liberal modernity and the incarnation of European liberty in Asia, Zhao was adding yet another layer to his "new Chinese nation" – the Chinese nation was to evolve along the path already traveled by Japan and, with the abolition of the unequal treaties upon her successful modernization, join with Japan in a united modern East Asia.

Zhao's conviction in East Asian unity came in part from his experience in the Japanese intellectual circles in Tokyo. The liberal legal scholars in Tokyo, who offered him support and guidance, not only shaped his intellectual views, but also made him convinced of the existence of an East Asian intellectual community that transcended

¹⁰⁸ Zhao Xinbo, "Ququ sandao heyi nengyu lieqiang xiang bingchi? [how did the three small islands catch up with the great powers?]", *Faxue xinbao*, no. 3 (1927):5.

¹⁰⁹ "Zhao Xinbo yu minda tiyuyuan zhi tanhua [Zhao Xinbo's conversation with a physical education instructor at the Republican University]", *Shijie ribao*, December 27, 1927.

nationalities. This small intellectual community served as the basis of Zhao's imagination of the greater East Asian community.

Zhao received considerable influence from his doctoral supervisor Hanai Takuzo (1868-1931), an active participant of the freedom and people's rights movement and lawyer known for his defense of civil rights. Widely commended for his ardent defense of the peasants' rights in the Ashio copper mine pollution incident in the 1890s and the legal rights of Kotoku Shusui after the High Treason incident in 1910, Hanai was among the most liberal legal scholars in late Meiji and Taisho Japan. Zhao's legal arguments for freedom and people's civil rights were parallel to Hanai's views, and he also accepted Hanai's stance against capital punishment, a position he later defended in the *Legal News* with enthusiasm.¹¹⁰

Yokota Hideo (1862-1938), the president of Meiji University during Zhao's doctoral study who later served as Japan's supreme justice, was also a key figure in Zhao's intellectual life. Zhao looked up to him as the role model of legal scholars and described him as "like a loving mother even when trialing the most ferocious assassin".¹¹¹ When he encountered difficulties in his modernization campaign in Manchuria in 1927, Zhao immediately thought of bringing in Yokota for help.¹¹² Yokota gladly accepted Zhao's invitation, arrived in Fengtian city in September 1927 and delivered an enthusiastic

¹¹⁰ Zhao Xinbo, "Jingshenbingzhe sixinglun [the issue of capital punishment for mentally ill criminals]", *Faxue xinbao*, no.1 (1927):1-2.

¹¹¹ Zhao Xinbo, "Ququ sandao heyi nengyu lieqiang xiang bingchi?", *Faxue xinbao*, no.3 (1927):5.

¹¹² "Zhao Xinbo di dongjing [Zhao Xinbo arrives in Tokyo]", *Shijie ribao*, April 28, 1927.

speech in Zhao's Sino-Japanese legal conference.¹¹³ He encouraged Zhao that "the cause of the Legal Association is the cause of culture and peace" and assured him of the Japanese intelligentsia's support for the abolition of unequal treaties. An advocate of Pan-Asianism, Yokota went on to say that Japan had learned from both Asia's spiritual civilization and Europe's material civilization. Should China choose to join Japan in the cause to revitalize East Asia, a new Asian civilization transcending the East-West divide would advent. This ideal of a global East Asian civilization caught Zhao's attention. In an essay on the relationship between the spirit of Japan and the salvation of Asian nations in 1935, Zhao applauded the Japanese for "creating a new culture" that benefited from but also transcended both the Eastern spiritual culture and the Western material culture. It was Japan's responsibility, Zhao concluded, to unite the other Asian nations in this "true spirit" of Asia.¹¹⁴

While Japanese intellectuals offered Zhao support and inspiration, Zhao also sought to influence them with his legal reforms. After the 1927 legal conference, he invited the Japanese participants to a tour in Manchuria to "show our Japanese friends the legal achievements of the Eastern provinces".¹¹⁵ One Japanese scholar, Maida Minoru, was very impressed with what he saw and wrote in an essay in the *Legal News* that the Chinese intellectual elites in Manchuria were most reasonable and the anti-Japanese

¹¹³ "faxue yanjiuhui kai jiangyanhui jilu [records of the speech conference of the legal association]", *Faxue xinbao*, no.1 (1927):21-22.

¹¹⁴ "nihon seishin to ajia minzuko no danketsu [the Japanese spirit and unity of the Asian nations]", in *Manshu to Chugoku no Yojin wo Kataru: Cho Shinpaku shi wo Kataru* [introduction of important figures in Manchukuo and China: Zhao Xinbo], 33-57.

¹¹⁵ "faxue yanjiuhui kai jiangyanhui jilu", *Faxue xinbao*, no.1 (1927):21-22.

sentiments among the people were caused by Japan's imperialistic diplomatic policies.

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It was from this reciprocal relationship with the liberal Japanese intellectuals that Zhao developed the belief in an intellectual community of East Asia that could transcend the nationalistic biases and growing animosity between China and Japan. Commenting on the participants of the legal conference in his opening remarks, he described them as “scholars not confined by their nationality and the prejudices of their nations”.¹¹⁷ When arguing for the abolition of unequal treaties, he also hoped for the support of the legal scholars “with no national biases” and criticized those denying China's equal national rights for their failure to live up to the standards of this international scholarly community.¹¹⁸ However, being a Japanese legal scholar did not automatically qualify an intellectual for membership in this community of “scholars with no national biases”. Those who were blinded by imperialist ambitions and failed to separate academics from politics were to be excluded.¹¹⁹ It is possible that Zhao developed his vision of East Asian unity on the basis of the East Asian intellectual community, as he had argued multiple times that economic co-prosperity was not true Sino-Japanese co-prosperity, and the true way towards East Asian unity lay in the promotion of shared modern culture and legal standards.

¹¹⁶ Maida Minoru, “manzhou suogan [observations and feelings in Manchuria]”, *Faxue xinbao*, no.7 (1927): 22-23.

¹¹⁷ “faxue yanjiuhui kai jiangyanhui jilu”, *Faxue xinbao*, no.1 (1927):21-22.

¹¹⁸ Zhao Xinbo, “bo zujiedi shi lingtu shuo [an argument against the theory that leased territories are permanent territories]”, *Faxue xinbao*, no.1 (1927): 3-6.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. In this article, Zhao criticized the Japanese legal scholars who insisted on not returning the leased territories to China for being “blinded by their nationality and personal biases”.

Although inspired by his Japanese Pan-Asianist colleagues, Zhao was not just a Pan-Asianist. He did not envision an Asia free of Western materialism, but imagined a peaceful world united under the post-WWI modern (Western) discourse of civilization. He believed that international law was ultimately based on international mutual trust and justice, which had, to his satisfaction, become the trend in the post-WWI era. Law was “a cause of culture and peace”, and it was the spread of the “civilized” legal values – which were all Western values in his writings – that would eventually bring the world together in grand harmony.¹²⁰ Zhao carried this ideal on to the Manchukuo era and viewed the establishment of the “new state”¹²¹ – a truly “new” political entity to which he decided to transfer his loyalty – as “the first step towards world unity”.¹²²

The prospect of eventual world harmony did not mean the immediate elimination of national borders and nation-states. On the contrary, to achieve this prospect, all nations must act in accordance with the accepted norms of international justice in the nation-state system. When the Soviet Union crossed the Sino-Soviet borders to attack Zhang Xueliang’s armed forces in the East Railroad conflicts of 1929, Zhao immediately went on the radio to call for a united resistance of “the Chinese nation” (*zhonghua minzu*) against this aggression under Zhang Xueliang – who just tried to arrest him and executed

¹²⁰ See, for example, Zhao’s speech delivered in Tokyo in May 1927 cited above.

¹²¹ The concept of a “new state” was frequently invoked by Zhao, first to denote the new China he envisioned, and then to applaud to the new Manchukuo he served. See Zhao Xinbo, *Shin Koka Dai Manshu* [Great Manchukuo the new state] (Tokyo: Tokyo Shobo, 1932).

¹²² “Kasanaru yorokobi: Cho Shinpaku shi kataru [repeated celebrations: Zhao Xinbo’s words]”, *Asahi shimbun*, January 21, 1934.

his patron Yang Yuting.¹²³ The reason he cited for resistance, however, was not that the nation had been humiliated (as other nationalists would do at the time), but that such an act of aggression was at variance with international law and must be stopped. The intermingling of the various cultural systems in Zhao's mind – statist nationalism, Northeast regionalism, and East Asian intellectual co-prosperity, together with the complex political situation of the time – had created an awkward juxtaposition of defensive nationalism and open transnationalism in Zhao's intellectual and political discourse.

Zhao's vision of a liberal Chinese nation and a culturally integrated East Asia was a product of the intertwining Chinese nationalist and Sino-Japanese liberal intellectual cultural systems. The attractive new meanings he derived from this cultural intersection for “the Chinese nation” and “legal modernity”, however, failed to secure for him acceptance among his nationalist colleagues.

Although Zhao tried hard to legitimize himself in the strongly nationalistic Fengtian culture of intellectual life in the late 1920s, his colleagues and “comrades” did not share his vision for the Chinese nation. Yan Baohang, a UK-educated intellectual and social activist who received strong influence from both the Nanjing Nationalists and the Soviets, criticized Zhao for his failure to incorporate the masses in his national vision and his defiance against the Nationalist authorities. In a speech given in Zhao's

¹²³ “Zhao Xinbo Boshi Duiyu Zhong'e Jian Zhi Yijian [Dr. Zhao's views on the Sino-Soviet conflicts]”, in *Faxue xinbao*, no.100 (1929): 17-18; “Zhao Xinbo Boshi Duiyu Zhong'e Jian Zhi Yijian (Xu) [Dr. Zhao's views on the Sino-Soviet conflicts (continued)]”, in *Faxue xinbao*, no.101 (1929): 20-23.

Sino-Japanese conference in 1930, Yan conceded that Zhao's Northeast Legal Association had made great contribution to the academic progress of Manchuria, but this was not enough, as "it is the people whom we must empower with all this legal knowledge".¹²⁴ The unequal treaties, Yan continued to argue, were not just hindering the emergence of a new China, but hurting "the Chinese people". Yan also warned Zhao, in a euphemistic manner, not to act on his own for the abolition of the unequal treaties, as "the central leadership (*zhongyang*)" had already taken the lead on this and the Northeasterners should act in accordance with the official line. Yan's Chinese nation was therefore not a diffuse federalist nation of liberal elites, but a nation of the People under party tutelage – a montage of the communist class nation and Nationalist central leadership.

Zhao's liberal vision of legal modernity was also at variance with the views of the young students at the Northeastern University law school, a center of legal studies in Manchuria in the 1920s. Yin Yongfa, a student of law at the University who later fled south to serve in the Nationalist ministry of defense during the war, for example, published various articles on the weekly newsletter of the University arguing for a strong nation with strict punitive laws.¹²⁵ He believed that the legal system should serve the purpose of national security and national survival, and that individual freedom should only be permitted on the condition that such freedom did not hinder national salvation.

¹²⁴ "Benhui zhaodai zhongri jizhe cangan fayuan jianyu shi", *Faxue xinbao*, no.115 (1930):11-15.

¹²⁵ Yin Yongfa, "Fazhi zhuyi lun [a treatise on the doctrine of the rule of law]", *Dongbei Daxue Zhoukan* [weekly newsletter of the Northeastern University], no.66 (1929) 66: 22-25; no.67 (1929): 7-12.

To deliberate and debate national politics in public, Yin argued, was such an abuse of harmful freedom that the law must seek to eliminate. This statist version of legal modernity was what “a modern civilized nation” should pursue. A graduate of the Whampoa military academy, Yin envisioned a modern Chinese nation under the leadership of the party state and viewed the kind of liberal legal reforms Zhao fervently pushed for as unnationalistic. It was no surprise, given his statist nationalist beliefs, that Yin pushed for armed national resistance against Japanese invasion immediately after the Mukden incident, while Zhao took the opposite path of collaboration.¹²⁶

At the same time with the intellectual debates over the definition of the Chinese nation, Zhao was also growing suspicious of the Nationalists and added a local dimension to his “new Chinese nation”. In early 1927, he was still telling the press that the north and the south could negotiate as long as the south gave up communism.¹²⁷ By the time the Nationalist state was in firm control of the southern provinces in late 1928, however, Zhao became desperate about the loss of his liberal national vision and advised Zhang Xueliang in a letter that the Nanjing Nationalists were “ambitious people with malign intentions towards our Northeast”.¹²⁸ They disregarded “the different conditions

¹²⁶ Yin urged the Nationalist government to wage a war against Japan after the Mukden incident. See Yin Yongfa, “Duirì waijiao yingfou caiqu tuoxietaidu [should we compromise in Sino-Japanese diplomacy?], *Waijiao yuebao*, no.4 (1934): 249-255.

¹²⁷ “Zhao Xinbo zaitan nanbei tuoxie [Zhao Xinbo talks about the compromise between north and south again], *Shijie ribao*, February 16, 1927.

¹²⁸ Zhao Xinbo, “Shang Zhang Hanqing zongsiling shu [letter to general Zhang Xueliang] (on Nov.21st, 1928)”, in *Mingrenjian* (1933), 27-29. Although this letter was published in the Manchukuo years and its polemical tone may be suspicious, I am inclined to think it was drafted on the date Zhao claimed, as he was in a desperate political situation due to Zhang Xueliang’s shift away from him towards the Nanjing nationalists at the time. Zhang was also about to execute his patron general Yang Yuting. The fact that Zhang sought to arrest him and that he sent another angry letter to Zhang, this one confirmed by *Asahi*

in the south and the Northeast” and “manipulated blind patriotism” to endanger the people of Manchuria. When the Chinese nation, the power to define whose boundaries had now fallen to the Nationalist state, became a threat to Zhao’s ideal Northeast and its good relations with Japan, Zhao decided to disaggregate his national vision from the cause of national unification and step back to the local, even though the Northeast was not really his place of birth but more of a base to experiment his ideals.

The conceptual differences between Zhao and Zhang Xueliang, who was in late 1928 pushing for national reunification, soon translated into political fights. Ten days after Zhao sent out his polemical letter, Zhang sent secret military police to arrest him and his close associate Tao Shangming in Tokyo.¹²⁹ Zhao sensed the danger and fled to Dalian, where he was protected, ironically, by the Japanese right of extraterritoriality he had sought to abolish. Zhang did not make further efforts to get rid of Zhao, possibly due to the need to stabilize his power base after the execution of his former political tutor Yang Yuting in January 1929. However, Zhao’s vision of the modern transnational Chinese nation became less popular in Zhang’s political circle thereafter. In 1930, the Northeast Cultural Association, a pro-Nanjing nationalist organization under Zhang’s support, found the office site of Zhao’s Legal Association in the former Qing imperial palace attractive and demanded Zhao to surrender it to them.¹³⁰ What appeared at first to

shimbun, about twenty days later indicates that he did provoke Zhang with such an anti-Nanjing letter in November 1928. See “Cho Shinpaku shi Dairen ni nigeru [Zhao Xinbo flees to Dalian]”, *Asahi shimbun*, December 6, 1928; “Cho Shinpaku hakushi kenbakusho teishutsu [Dr. Zhao Xinbo sends a letter of suggestions to Zhang Xueliang]”, *Asahi shimbun*, December 10, 1928.

¹²⁹ “Cho Shinpaku shi Dairen ni nigeru”, *Asahi shimbun*, December 6, 1928.

¹³⁰ Official letters between the Northeast Legal Association, the Northeast Cultural Association, and the

be a trivial administrative dispute soon became a struggle between two visions for the Chinese nation, as both sides escalated the fight with the rhetoric of “national salvation”. The Cultural association indicated in their official letter to Zhao that they needed to move in as soon as possible to pursue their grand cause of saving the nation. Zhao responded, in an angry petition to Zhang Xueliang, that his work was “also vital to the salvation of our nation” and “matters to the image of our Northeast in the foreign press”. More to the point, his vision of national salvation “was approved by the late generalissimo Zhang Zuolin”. After numerous debates and a press tour to his office site he organized to demonstrate his political firepower, Zhao managed to keep his office building, but perhaps at the expense of further alienating himself from the nationalist intellectual community dominating Fengtian at the time.¹³¹

In this intellectual habitus and political environment, it was only natural for Zhao to welcome the Japanese into Fengtian city and serve on the local peace maintenance committee with Yuan Jinkai. In an article about his experience after the Mukden incident penned in 1935, Zhao gladly justified his choice by criticizing Zhang Xueliang’s failure to appreciate his vision for national salvation and East Asian co-prosperity.¹³² Unlike Yuan Jinkai, who had never been completely comfortable with collaboration, Zhao even went so far as to confess (or perhaps to retrospectively imagine) that he had been plotting

Liaoning provincial governments between Mar.3rd and 20th, 1930, Liaoning provincial archives, JC 10-1-13211.

¹³¹ “Dongbei faxue yanjiuhui zhaodai jizhetuan cangan fayuan jianyu [the Northeastern Legal Association invites journalists to visit courts and prison]”, *Shengjing shibao*, March 22, 1930.

¹³² Zhao Xinbo, “Manshu jihen kenkoku ni itaru keika gairyaku [the general situation from the Mukden incident to the founding of the new state]”, in *Manshu to Chugoku no Yojin wo Kataru: Cho Shinpaku shi wo Kataru*, 19-28.

to drive Zhang Xueliang out of Manchuria in 1930. Invoking the legal scholar community again, he indicated that he was planning for this heroic action together with “the worthy people with righteous ambitions” within the Manchurian legal circles. His self-identification as a member of the imagined East Asian intellectual community had once again become vital, this time for the justification of his roundly criticized choice to collaborate with the national enemy.

With their individual systems of symbolic meanings, Yuan and Zhao sought to work with the various cultural and political communities in Manchuria by constructing middle grounds, speaking to each community with the symbolic meanings they considered legitimate in their respective cultural systems. Dealing with the Japanese with Confucian rhetoric, Yuan nevertheless justified his political endeavors in the Fengtian civil administration to the Chinese generals and technocrats as a means to save the nation. Sharing “the Russian threat” as a symbol of negative implication with his nationalist colleagues under Zhang Xueliang, he also tried to bridge the gap between his local Liaoyang literati community, whose anti-Russian sentiments were based on lived experiences in the Russo-Japanese war, and Zhang Xueliang’s inner circle, who resented the Soviet Union because of conflicting national interests. These efforts, although fraught with misunderstandings and frustrations, nonetheless allowed Yuan to work effectively as a politician in the repressive Manchurian political environment for two decades before Manchukuo. In his narrative of his collaboration, Yuan invoked such

experiences and likened his role in the local peace maintenance committee in 1931 to those in the aftermath of the 1911 revolution and 1928 Huanggutun incident¹³³, characterizing collaboration as just another effort of middle ground construction.¹³⁴

Similarly, Zhao sought to work with the Fengtian technocrats with the rhetoric of retrieving China's national rights, yet spoke to his Japanese comrades with the language of transnational peace. While reporting to Zhang Zuolin that he was retrieving legal rights for Zhang's Manchuria, Zhao nevertheless used the symbols of national unification and the salvation of the greater China to justify his cause to his patriotic Chinese audiences in Tokyo. Although less known in China proper, Zhao was actually more successful in pushing for the abolition of unequal treaties in Japan than the illustrious figure Sun Yat-sen. Whereas Sun's call for the same cause in Kobe received little response in the Japanese media in 1924, Zhao secured the support of prominent Japanese legal scholars in his endeavors. Shifting between the various social languages at his disposal to construct middle grounds with the various dominant cultural communities, Zhao promoted his own cause, justified in his mental contact zone, in the fragmented public sphere of Chinese Manchuria and tried to do so again, yet this time in vain, in early Manchukuo.

¹³³ The incident on June 4, 1928 in which Zhang Zuolin was assassinated by the officers of the Japanese Kwangtung army.

¹³⁴ Yuan Jinkai, *Yonglu jingguo zishu*, vol.2, 10.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In the sections above, I have presented a sketch of the intellectual and political lives of Yuan Jinkai and Zhao Xinbo, two intellectual-politicians with radically different aspirations and beliefs whose life trajectory converged at the moment of collaboration in September 1931. Their experiences and thoughts were by no means consistent with each other, but they were both operating in a similar cultural context – the frontier world of multiple overlapping cultural systems. Theirs was an age of wars, revolutions and constantly changing national boundaries. What appear to us modern observers as fixed national entities was at that time frontier zones entangled in great power politics and local political rivalries. No one could tell what future might hold, and in that cultural space of uncertainty, they had no choice but to improvise solutions to whatever problems they encountered along the way. The very first problem they had to solve was the problem of identity: they were at the same time Chinese, Northeasterners, intellectuals, and Qizu on the margins of a dominantly Han Republican society. As well educated social elites, they were exposed to a wide range of intellectual resources and choices, but were also confined to the cultural intersections in which they were positioned. Ultimately, they had to secure legitimacy as intellectuals and political advisors in the overlapping cultures of intellectual life in Fengtian city. It was in this peculiar cultural world that Yuan invented his local China, and Zhao created his transient modern liberal Chinese nation. They took a bit of everything from the symbols and meanings the various cultural

systems had to offer, and improvised new webs of meanings in their own mental contact zones. Unfortunate to them, the only certainty they could expect was that such webs of meanings were only shared by the very few people in the same cultural intersections with them.

Here's where the spatial dimension comes in in this story: Jin Yufu, Yuan's close friend who also hailed from Liaoyang and cared a lot for the local Liaodong cultural tradition, chose to escape from Manchukuo in 1934 likely due to his study at Peking University and the sense of centripetal nationalism he developed in that intellectual community. Zhao Quantian (1898-1964), Zhao Xinbo's colleague in legal research in Fengtian city, also followed Jin's path, most likely because of his study in the US and the different national consciousness he developed in that different cultural space. Even though they shared membership in many overlapping cultural communities, the different cultural spaces they traversed in their intellectual life eventually placed them in different cultural intersections and justified different political choices.¹³⁵

Neither of the two protagonists was able to sell their visions to their Chinese audiences in the Republican era, and both had good reasons to stay on after September 1931 for what they must have imagined to be an era of peace and opportunity. This optimism, which they must have developed in their interaction with the moderate Japanese intellectuals, proved fatal to them. Manchukuo was ultimately a chimera, one

¹³⁵ The spatial dimension of intellectual history has been brilliantly analyzed by Yeh Wen-hsin in her work on the May Fourth intellectuals in Zhejiang province. See Yeh Wen-hsin, *Provincial Passages: Culture, Space and the Origins of Chinese Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

dominated by the Kwangtung army and its economic ambitions. The architects of the new state left no place for them, and whatever ideals they had for this new nation were soon torn apart by the bleak reality of militarism and massive exploitation.

Historians have thought of the Chinese collaborators in Manchukuo as outdated Qing revivalists and political losers seeking to regain their political influence in despair. I have hoped to show in my case studies of Yuan Jinkai and Zhao Xinbo that such was not the whole truth. The category “intellectual collaborators” encompassed a whole range of different scholars and thinkers who for a variety of reasons chose the Japanese over the Nanjing Nationalists. The desire to restore the Qing did play a role in Yuan’s collaboration, but it was just one of the many cultural systems whose “collaboration” created the rationale for Yuan to stay on but at the same time to refuse full cooperation with the Japanese state builders. There were also those who genuinely believed that Japan was the leader in East Asia’s modernization project, a belief Zhao Xinbo shared with the much more famous Korean collaborator Yi Kwang-su (1892-1950).

It is also my intention to demonstrate that nationalism, in whichever form, was not always the dominant way of thinking in the Manchurian frontier zone before the Manchukuo era. The various forms of nationalisms were all new comers to the region that had to compete not just amongst themselves but also with other discourses. “China” did not simply become “the Chinese nation” through a linear, triumphant evolution of national consciousness. The various conceptualizations of China and Chinese-ness were not all nationalistic in Yuan’s mind. What we actually see is a juxtaposition and montage

of Confucian culturalism, Fengtian localism, Chinese nationalism, and a flickering sense of East Asian transnationalism.

Although this has so far been a local story, Yuan, Zhao and the intellectual collaborators around them were actually part of the new globality the world was about to celebrate in the post-WWII era. Yuan situated himself in the post-WWII discourse of collaboration, which Margherita Zanasi has led us to see, by defending a Chinese nation of the people, land and cultural traditions rather than the state regime.¹³⁶ Yuan might not have been conscious of it at the time, but he was presenting an argument parallel to that of Henri Petain of Vichy France and Wang Jingwei of the collaborationist Nanjing Nationalist government. The tension between the nation of the state and the nation of the people – however and by whomever they were defined – was a revolving issue of the early 20th century world, and Yuan's reasoning was the local incarnation of a global problem. So it was with Zhao Xinbo, who set out to imagine a world of grand unity based on universal values, a world so tempting yet still so vague today.

The condemnation of collaboration and the glorification of resistant governments have been the basis of the post-WWII political arrangements in nearly all formerly occupied regions. The era of war is over, but the black and white view of collaboration and resistance has never faded away. The most recent manifestation of this simplistic reading of human behavior is the new codes of conduct issued by the political work

¹³⁶ Margherita Zanasi, "Globalizing Hanjian: The Suzhou Trials and the Post-WWII Discourse on Collaboration", *American Historical Review* 113 (June 2008): 731-751.

department of the People's Liberation Army of China, which still views the act of surrender on the battlefield as treason. The issues of collaboration and nationalism are therefore not just artifacts from the impalpable past, but problems of real implications still relevant today.

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