Stones in the Sea: Wang Jingwei, Nationalism, and Collaboration
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Human history is in this sense no different from the planet Earth: it continues relentlessly on its path, whether at noontime or at midnight.

—Chen Duxiu, “A Sketch of the Post-War World”
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List of Abbreviations

RCS: Revive China Society
KMT: Kuomintang, the Nationalist Party
CCP: Chinese Communist Party
IJA: Imperial Japanese Army
IJN: Imperial Japanese Navy
CCC: Cotton Control Commission

Note on Romanization

I use standard Pinyin for most Romanizations, but defer to conventional names for certain famous places and people, such as Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan) and Canton (Guangzhou).
Introduction

A long time ago, there was a young princess named Nüwa. Playful and full of spirit, she spent her days running along the bluffs of East China, breathing the salt air and watching the birds ride the currents. Daughter of the great Flame Emperor, Nüwa was proud, perhaps too proud. She twirled and jumped, rolling around in the grass and not paying much mind to where the edge lay. The ocean breeze was fresh, the sky grey, mixing with the turbid black seas as she fell from the bluffs. Nüwa drowned that day in the harsh waters along the rocks. However, upon the death of her human self she transformed into a little sparrow. Proud past the grave, she roared at the sea. “How awful! How many more will die as I did?” The sea laughed. She roared again, resolving to fill the sea so that no one would meet the same fate. But, she was a bird now, a small one at that. The sea laughed. She took flight to the western forests, grabbing small twigs and pebbles, lugging them back and dropping them into the deep. One stone at a time, she swore to fill the sea. This plucky bird is known as Jingwei, and was a source of particular inspiration for the revolutionary figure Wang Zhaoming (1883-1944), who was so enamored with the tale of great goals and endless determination that he took Jingwei as his pen name. He is still known as Wang Jingwei to this day, though his name carries little of the respect it once did.

Wang Jingwei remains a highly divisive figure in Chinese history, particularly given the strong feelings most Chinese have regarding what is known as the War of Resistance against Japan in China and the Second Sino-Japanese War in the West. To his supporters, Wang was a revolutionary, a poet, the right-hand man and preferred successor of Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) whose power was usurped in a coup by the
militarist Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975). Indeed, in his actions Wang’s supporters see a man who sought to staunch the bleeding of a heavily lopsided war that seemed largely lost after the fall of Hankou in 1938, and in doing so preserve the lives and livelihoods of his countrymen. To his detractors, however, Wang was a traitor, a coward, a bitter old opportunist who thought nothing of subjecting his countrymen to the rule of the hated Japanese imperialists so long as he was at the top of the heap. As different sides emphasize different dimensions of his life, some context is needed so that we may better understand the life of Wang and thereby better grasp his later appraisals. What sort of man was Wang Jingwei? What did he want to accomplish?

From my research, I believe that Wang Jingwei was a nationalist above all, one who believed deeply in Sun Yat-sen’s mission of establishing a democratic Chinese republic. To this end, he dedicated his life to the promotion of the Three People’s Principles and to the realization of Sun’s dream. This dedication to his nationalist agenda would lead him into direct conflict with rivals on all ends of the political spectrum, and eventually lead him to collaborate with the Japanese. However, this was all consistent with his understanding of Sunism, and was all for the purpose of national reconstruction, which he believed to be the foundation of national revival. According to his understanding, cooperating with the Japanese was the patriotic choice.
Chapter One: The Rise and Fall of Wang Jingwei

Section I: Wang’s Rise to Prominence

Wang Jingwei, given name Wang Zhaoming, was born in 1883 to Wang Shu and Wushi in the Samsui district of Foshan, Guangdong, and came of age during a period of national instability. His parents were strict when it came to education, and Wang spent much of his childhood studying poetry and the classics. This strict home education left Wang with a passion for the written word and for learning more broadly, a passion that led him to Japan eventually. Seeking to prove his worth and earn prize money, Wang submitted essays to local writing competitions, winning frequently. This reputation for literary merit stemmed largely from his eloquence, but he also passed several official examinations, including one that qualified him for a scholarship to study at Hosei University in Tokyo in 1905.¹ Eager to seize this opportunity, Wang spent the next several years studying political science in Tokyo, meeting many Chinese revolutionaries and political radicals there. Like Wang, they too were dissatisfied with the state of affairs in China, which at that point was the inferior party in many unequal treaties, including the recent Treaty of Tientsin and Treaty of Shimonoseki.

After meeting Sun Yat-sen and making a favorable impression with his knowledge of classical poetry, he joined the Tongmenghui, also known as the United League, and became a leading orator among the revolutionaries. While there were many reformists and revolutionary groups in this era, the Tongmenghui, led by Sun

¹ Don Bate, Wang Ching-wei: Puppet or Patriot, (Chicago: R. F. Seymour, 1941), 21.
Yat-sen, promoted the establishment of a modern Chinese republic modeled on Western multi-branch democracies. This required the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912). Therefore, after completing his degree at Hosei and spending several years writing articles for the revolutionary newspaper Min Pao, Wang left Japan for Beijing to assassinate the Prince Regent Zaifeng (1883-1951). While this attack was somewhat symbolic, given the power of the entrenched Qing bureaucracy and the relative weakness of the Emperor as demonstrated by the Empress Dowager Cixi’s (1835-1908) sidelining of the Guangxu Emperor (1871-1908), the assassination of the Prince Regent would have been a heavy blow to the rule of the Aisin Goro clan and their claim to legitimate dynastic rule of China. Unfortunately for the revolutionaries, the assassination attempt, which itself was a plan C, did not go smoothly.

According to the Foreign Ministry advisor and economic observer T’ang Leang-Li (1901-1970), who notably would later join Wang’s government in Nanjing, the plot to kill the Prince Regent Zaifeng was to be carried out with explosives in a dense neighborhood through which the prince often travelled.² Wang and his comrades were in the process of planting the explosives along this street when Wang, moved by concern for the locals’ safety, convinced his comrades to alter the plan as to minimize civilian casualties. They decided that instead of rigging the street to blow, they would rig a bridge that the prince would pass under along the same route. This way the bridge would collapse and crush the prince and his guards, which the conspirators preferred to blowing up a densely populated street. However, despite

² Wang Ching-wei [Wang Jingwei], China’s Problems and Their Solution, (Shanghai: China United Press, 1934), X.
their careful planning, the conspirators did not successfully finish planting their explosives under the bridge. Unfortunately for Wang and his comrades, they made too much noise while trying to install their explosives, and caught the attention of some neighborhood dogs. These dogs then caught the attention of a patrolling policeman. Wang and his comrades were summarily arrested, and Wang, according to T’ang, was sentenced to death within the year.³

It is worth noting that different accounts of this night exist; even different accounts of the results exist. For instance, the Wang Jingwei Irrevocable Trust’s website—hereafter referred to as the Trust—gives a dramatically different version than T’ang, stating in a section titled “Biography: Wang Jingwei 1883-1944” that:

...in a dramatic bid to topple the Qing administration, Wang organized a team to assassinate the Prince Regent Zaifeng. Even though the attempt failed and Wang was arrested, he was not sentenced to death. He was released after only a year’s imprisonment. Prince Suzhong Shanqi (1866-1922) was reportedly moved by Wang and his "Impromptu verses upon my arrest," which included the two lines: “Feeling excited before the decapitating knife in front of me, I know my young head will not be wasted.”⁴

T’ang and the Trust are both sympathetic to Wang and indeed should be considered actively pro-Wang. T’ang was described as “the zealous fides Aehates [sic] of his hero [Wang]” who “sometimes allows his perspective to be distorted by his love” by

³ Ibid., xvi.
The Spectator, while the Trust is explicitly dedicated to “further[ing] the understanding of the life and ideas of Wang Jingwei”. However, even these full-throated supporters disagree on the details surrounding this critical moment. Considering the basic narratives of Wang as recorded in encyclopedias like Wikipedia and Baidu Baike also disagree on this point, and further considering that even recent newspaper and scholarly articles, like Mark O’Neill’s article in the South China Morning Post, disagree, it shows that the details of Wang’s life are unclear; yet, notably, this detail is not one that is widely politicized. Sympathizers like T’ang and detractors like the editors of Baidu Baike—while content on Baidu is moderated by Chinese government censors who enforce state narratives, Wang Jingwei is hardly a beloved figure on the Chinese mainland to begin with—both claim that Wang was sentenced to death. In exact terms, Baidu Baike claims that Wang was declared to be acting in outrageous defiance of law and morality, and was therefore to be immediately beheaded. Nevertheless, even though some sympathizers like O’Neill and the Trust believe him to have been only imprisoned, they themselves disagree on

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9 《被逮口占》 [Impromptu Verses upon My Arrest], Baidu Baike, 9-4-2017, https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E8%A2%AB%E9%80%AE%E5%8F%A3%E5%8D%A0.
the duration. Perhaps we ought to return to Wang’s poem “Impromptu Verses upon My Arrest” cited by the Trust. If he was “facing the decapitating knife”, had been arrested as an active participant in a plot to assassinate the Prince Regent, and had been a credible threat to public order, it seems most likely that Wang was indeed sentenced to death. While this may be simply be a matter of interpretation, the mystery surrounding the facts of Wang’s revolutionary past are critical in that later narratives of Wang, whether critical or supportive, all build off of this past. Therefore, understanding this past is important for understanding Wang’s political reputation later on.

The journalist Don Bate’s *Wang Ching-wei: Puppet or Patriot* provides some useful insight here. While Bate’s account of the rise and fall of Wang Jingwei was heavily informed by T’ang Leang-Li and Bate’s own personal admiration for Wang— influences that Bate himself acknowledges and that *Foreign Affairs* noted in a less than favorable review written by Robert Gale Woolbert—the book is valuable in that it includes a detailed account of the Zaifeng plot and of Wang’s political environment in general. According to Bate, Wang was spurred to action by the frequent failures of the Tongmenghui to incite revolution and destabilize the Manchu regime. Living in Tokyo and writing for the revolutionary *Min Pao* until court pressure led to the Chinese revolutionaries being expelled from Japan in 1906, Wang sought to advance the revolution, not simply write about it. To this effect, he ordered his comrades— ignoring the advice of Sun Yat-sen and Hu Hanmin—off to Canton to assassinate the Viceroy of Liangguang. This proved untenable for unclear reasons, and so he and his comrades then changed their aim to a local magistrate in Hankou. After arrival in
Hankou, they (Chen Bijun, Huang Fusheng, Li Zhongxi, and You Yanji) then decided that killing a local magistrate in Hankou was not as good as killing a national figure elsewhere or any official in the capital; unfortunately for the conspirators, they had used up too much money on the path from Tokyo to Hankou, and now had to bide their time and find some cash.\footnote{Bate, \textit{Wang Ching-wei: Puppet or Patriot}, 27.}

After Chen liquidated some of her family’s assets, the conspirators had the funds to travel to and secure lodging in the capital. Wang opened a photography studio and his comrade Huang rented a nearby house to serve as bases for the conspirators. Deciding that to make this gambit worthwhile they had to make a major statement, the conspirators resolved to assassinate the Prince Regent Zaifeng—the father and regent to the boy Xuantong Emperor, otherwise known as Pu Yi (1906-1967). However, the conspirators soon found that the Prince Regent, who had been selected as their primary target due to his visibility, rarely left the palace and almost never traveled on the street the photography studio was on. Therefore, they decided to instead rig the bridge closer to the palace that the regent was known to travel under, when a comrade stepped on a dog on the third night of installation, sending the dog and subsequently the other neighborhood dogs into a barking frenzy. This frenzy alerted the patrolman in the area, and the conspirators had no choice but to flee the scene. Notably, the welfare of the neighborhood people is not emphasized in this retelling of the Zaifeng plot.

Chen, Li, and You returned to Tokyo to obtain more explosives, while Huang
and Wang laid low in their Beijing hideouts. Unfortunately for the conspirators, the police were quick and thorough—T’ang explicitly blames Huang for drawing attention to the pair by hanging around the bridge in daylight and revealing his false queue in public view—and the two were summarily arrested on charges of attempted assassination and revolutionary activity.\textsuperscript{11} According to Bate, the Prince Regent initially condemned Wang to death. While those convicted of “revolutionary activity” were only sentenced to jail time in the late Qing as a result of Prince San Chi’s moderating influence, Wang were charged with the attempted assassination of the second-highest figure in the court. However, according to Bate the Prime Minister was talked out of executing Wang by the reformist official Prince Tsu and the Northern Army divisional commander Wu Luchen, who feared public blowback over the execution of this famous revolutionary.\textsuperscript{12} This account accords with that of political historian Edward S. Krebs, who stated that Wang Jingwei and Huang Fusheng were sentenced to life imprisonment by Zaifeng in his capacity as Prince Regent. This was a lenient punishment, as Zaifeng hoped to avoid the public unrest that would come with executing two well-known revolutionaries, particularly given the dynasty’s weakening grip on the country in 1910.\textsuperscript{13}

Plainly not everyone has the same understanding of the Zaifeng plot, but does it matter? The inconsistencies are not necessarily partisan, and rather seem to stem from misinformation or differences in interpretation. There are several key takeaways

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., pp. 33-34.
from these competing accounts. First, the details of Wang Jingwei’s life are not clear, and indeed opponents and supporters alike often disagree about specifics. This only becomes more apparent when we look at more contemporary sources like Bate or examine the words of Wang himself. Second, Wang earned a reputation for revolutionary patriotism through intellectual activities—like writing for the Min Pao—and through vanguard actions. Third, Wang was an ardent promoter of Sun Yat-sen and his early, uncodified Three People’s Principles, delivering a long speech during interrogation touting the Three People’s Principles as the cure China needed and the Qing monarchy as a foreign, antiquated institution that stood in the way of the national revival. The failure of the Zaifeng plot and Wang’s arrest catapulted Wang to the forefront of the revolutionary scene, and would be the foundation of his later political credentials as a zealous, Sunist nationalist.

Why did Wang personally find the Manchu regime so intolerable, even while living outside its domains? Was it that the Qing Dynasty was a feudal empire that had fallen hopelessly behind the times? Was it that the court was insular and seemingly unconcerned with the protection of the empire, as could be seen in actions like the Empress-Dowager Cixi’s famous renovation of the Summer Palace with funds meant for military modernization or in the empire’s weakness in the face of imperialist bullying? Surely these and others were among the many reasons revolutionaries gave to justify rebellion against the court. However, in keeping with Sun Yat-sen, Hu Hanmin (1879-1936), and other Chinese nationalists of the era, one of the most

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intolerable things about the Manchu dynasty was that it was Manchu. Consider Wang’s assessment of the Manchus as “the sky to the earth” of China; that is, the Manchus were so distant from the Chinese in customs and degree of civilization that their government could never hope to be improved by reform, and therefore revolution was the only way to fix the problems then facing the Chinese nation.\textsuperscript{15}

This racist, to use the late nineteenth-century conception of race (人種 renzhong) and sub-race/nation (民族 minzu) as Sun and Wang did, dismissal of the Manchus was shared by many in the Nationalist movement, with the justification largely resting on Sun’s assertion that nations were natural and states artificial.\textsuperscript{16} Therefore, a “retarded” nation like the Manchus (to quote Janet Lloyd’s translation of Marie-Claire Bergère) could not hope to produce a modern state, as the Manchus were fundamentally not a modern people.\textsuperscript{17} This was a significant reason for revolution according to at least some prominent thinkers in the Nationalist movement, including Wang.

Section II: Wang Jingwei and Sun Yat-sen

Having discussed one key period in Wang’s political life, let us discuss now another: Wang and his place in the KMT power struggles of the 1920s. Wang was one of many Chinese revolutionaries and revolutionaries-to-be who studied abroad in Europe during the 1910s, with Wang himself departing for Paris with his wife Chen


\textsuperscript{17} Bergère, \textit{Sun Yat-sen}, 159.
Bijun in 1912. Why did this ardent nationalist, who had only recently been released from prison in the wake of the Xinhai Revolution and who had before been living in exile in Japan and then-French Indochina, promptly leave China for the distant West? According to Wang, there was a lack of national consciousness among the Chinese citizenry; they did not consider themselves Chinese nationals and citizens, but rather maintained local identities and indeed sought personal profit at the expense of national welfare.\footnote{Wang Jingwei, 《吾人對於中國之責任》 [Our Responsibility to China], \textit{Wang Jingwei Irrevocable Trust, 1917}, \url{http://wangjingwei.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/wjw-pws-0229-0240.pdf}, 230.} This is a direct echo of Sun’s concerns that local identities and clannism prevented the emergence of a greater Chinese nationalism.\footnote{Sun Yat-sen, \textit{San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People (with Two Supplementary Chapters by President Chiang Kai-shek)}, trans. Frank Price, (Taipei: China Publishing Co., 1947), 2.} To change this, he hoped to observe how modern citizen-nations like France cultivated this national consciousness. Moreover, a lifelong poet and writer, Wang also hoped to spend some time pursuing his own interests. Wang wrote:

Since the nation has been unified, those who think deeply have realized that although the tyrants have been done away with, most people’s thinking hasn’t progressed. For the future of our countrymen, we must change their thought…For years I have been on the run, detained, unable to fulfill my aspirations. Somewhere in the course of my studies, I long ago resolved to go to Europe, partly for my own education, but also to tirelessly study the
people’s psyche and how to correct it.\textsuperscript{20}

To Wang, this perceived lack of social consciousness was a grave threat to the fledgling Republic, which was supposedly democratic—or at least on the path to democracy—and thus required enthusiastic identification with and at least partial participation at all levels of society; therefore, he sought to study Western societies and learn how “correct” social consciousness was cultivated in states like France and Germany.\textsuperscript{21} It ought to be noted that Wang’s frequent travels outside of the country and interest in foreign studies are well in line with Sun Yat-sen’s notion of a productive meeting of East and West, but were also later a liability for Wang. Wang was often not physically present in China during important events like the establishment and dissolution of the first national parliament, while nativist sentiment became more powerful and prevalent in political circles. This is perhaps best exemplified by Chiang Kai-shek, a rival of Wang’s who would soon change the landscape of Kuomintang and Chinese politics drastically.

Chiang, however, did not enter the political world until later in the 1920s. During the 1910s, Wang himself enjoyed a high status within the revolutionary movement because of his Xinhai credentials and his close personal relationship with Sun Yat-sen. This relationship is the second major foundation of Wang’s later claims

Original text: 《弟自民國統一以來，所深思熟慮者，以今日中國專制雖去，而大多數之人民思想猶未進步。為吾同胞前途計，必變其思想…弟懷此志，而自以兩年奔走拘留，學殖久荒，故決遊歐洲，一面自力於學，一面稍稍致力於人們心理之感化。》

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 2894.
to party leadership. According to Bate’s account, the well-educated Sun had been so impressed by Wang on their first meeting at a gathering of revolutionaries in Tokyo that the two talked for hours, largely about classical literature and remedies for China’s troubles. Sun was so impressed by Wang’s eloquence and sincerity that he immediately offered Wang, who had been scraping by off article commissions ever since the Manchu government cut off his scholarship money, a position as his secretary. Wang was therefore in close contact with Sun, and indeed took great care of his relationship with the doctor. At least, this is the explanation Bate provides for why Wang, following the National Assembly’s election of Sun as the President of the Republic in December of 1911, turned down an offer that would have made him the chair of the Tongmenghui.22 That he would turn down such an honor, the Tongmenghui being Sun’s revolutionary alliance, signifies how seriously he took his personal mission and his personal relationship with Sun. Moreover, Wang’s study in France was interrupted at the urgent request of Sun Yat-sen in 1916, as Sun needed his comrades back to fight against what he decried as a corrupt and reactionary government, first lead by the Beiyang General and Hongxian Emperor Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) and later by the warlords Duan Qirui (1865-1936) and Wu Peifu (1874-1939).

This itself can be interpreted in two ways: either Wang was personally important to Sun, or Sun was desperate enough to call back any comrades available, even those far overseas. When we look at Sun’s dwindling power in the post-Yuan

22 Bate, Wang Ching-wei: Puppet or Patriot, 47.
years of the late 1910s, it would appear that Sun had reason for drastic action.\textsuperscript{23} Sun was at this point receiving only conditional and grudging aid from his Japanese benefactors, who began funding various warlord groups, seized German holdings in Shantung, and imposed their Twenty-One Demands upon Yuan Shikai’s government. In short, the Japanese viewed Sun as another warlord that could be played off the others to keep China divided. This indicated Japanese policy with regards to China was increasingly aimed at extraction and domination, rather than promoting the rise of a unified state under Sun’s Japan-educated coalition. Moreover, the international community largely recognized the government of the Peking warlords, writing off the disorganized republicans as yet more warlords. Plainly, Sun was not in a good situation in the late 1910s. Of course, this hardly means that Wang was not important to Sun, only that Sun himself was not the key player in domestic politics.

Bate, however, makes sure to draw a clear line between Sun and Wang. Wang is no lackey, according to Bate, and indeed removed himself from the political scene during Sun’s first ill-fated restoration of the KMT as he believed Sun had claimed too much political authority for himself. Sun’s emphasis on personalistic rule in this iteration of the revolutionary movement alienated many of his political allies, including Wang and Hu Hanmin. It wasn’t until 1920, when he relinquished his claims as the Marshal of Canton and reestablished the KMT as a proper civilian party in Canton that he managed to reunify the coalition. However, the various warlords and the Beijing government had strengthened themselves during these several years, and so the KMT was not in a position to unify China under its rule. As a result, Sun

\textsuperscript{23} Bergère, \textit{Sun Yat-sen}, 264.
sought help from abroad in reorganizing the KMT, which had been reduced from a broad and national revolutionary movement to one of many regional fiefdoms. This necessitated the aid of the Guangxi warlords and the newly formed USSR, whose government was looking for a friend along its southeastern border and a potential ally in the anti-imperial struggle.

While Wang had kept some distance from Sun during his Marshal years, Wang’s views were closely tied to Sun’s and the two men shared a close relationship. Indeed, Wang wrote, or at least drafted, Sun Yat-sen’s two wills—one political, which charged the reader with carrying out the national revolution and bringing his vision of republican government to fruition, and one familial, which gave all of Sun’s possessions to his wife, Soong Ching-ling (1893-1981).24 Whether or not he himself wrote the wills in their entirety, that Wang was present at Sun’s deathbed and received from him final thoughts about the direction of the revolutionary party’s aims was more than enough to establish Wang as a major figure within the KMT, and helped differentiate his claims to leadership from other old revolutionaries like Hu Hanmin and Liao Zhongkai (1877-1925). It could be argued that Wang made a conscious attempt to faithfully transmit Sun’s thought, as can be seen in the similarities between Wang’s thought and Sun’s. Wang’s words of “reforming psyche” themselves are mirrored in Sun’s assertions that the Chinese people, suffering from a “slave psychology” stemming from millennia of despotic rule, were not ready for the immediate implementation of constitutional and democratic government.25 While this

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24 Bate, *Wang Ching-wei: Puppet or Patriot*, 82.
25 Ibid., 48.
is plainly in line with Sun’s own writing, particularly where the issue of “natural inequality” and the role of education is concerned, we ought to note that Bate is heavily informed by T’ang, and therefore does play up Wang’s connection with Sun ideologically and personally to cement Wang’s position as a true Chinese revolutionary and nationalist. Why was it so important to reinforce these claims?

Section III: Wang, Chiang, and the Disunity of the KMT

While it may seem that Wang Jingwei and Chiang Kai-shek were always destined to clash, for a time the two worked well together—at least according to Bate’s account. Wang, as the leader of the Central Executive Council and therefore the effective civilian head of the Kuomintang and the United Front, worked to implement the Three People’s Principles and bring a republican Chinese state to fruition. Chiang, of the same heart, also worked to these ends, commanding the relatively small but well-trained National Army from the Soviet-sponsored and organized Whampoa Military Academy in Canton. As both Wang and Chiang believed the immediate unification of the nation to be of utmost importance, the two cooperated closely for some time. Chiang, however, was hardly content to be just an influential military figure. This can be seen in his cultivation of a personally-loyal officer corps at Whampoa and the direct implementation of his will onto the Kuomintang’s policies—the clearest example before April 1927 being the purging of the Communists from the National Army.

According to Bate, one reason Wang and Chiang were able to cooperate

26 Ibid., 90.
during the immediate years after Sun’s death was that Sun’s presence was still strongly felt among the higher echelons of the KMT, and this personal union was initially preserved. The KMT was a broad alliance held largely together by a common goal and Sun’s individual charisma. Without Sun to smooth things over, and with the unification of the nation being more or less completed by 1927, long-buried disagreements boiled over into outright conflict. Bate spins a tale of a corrupt Hu Hanmin who, seeking to preserve and advance the power of his brothers in Canton, plotted against the three other power brokers in the KMT (Wang, Chiang, and Liao Zhongkai). After the death of Liao and Han’s subsequent imprisonment at the joint request of Wang, Chiang, and Xu Chongzhi (1887-1965), only the esteemed revolutionary Wang and the powerful general Chiang would be left in play, but the stage for Chiang’s rise had already been set.27 Xu himself was suspected in the death of Liao, and Chiang took his seat as the head of KMT military affairs.

From here Chiang’s rise was quick. While historian Jay Taylor attributes this to Chiang’s personally loyal army and his forceful personality, Bate attributes this to a rightist conspiracy in which the old guard sought to preserve their wealth and status; therefore, they found the KMT, and especially the leftist Wang, a threat to their wealth and privilege. That the KMT and the CCP were openly working together and indeed under the same umbrella only reinforced the rightists’ fears of a class revolution. The conservative elites therefore sought to coopt the conservative elements of this broad revolutionary movement and split the United Front, thereby

securing the allegiances of an organized party-army and declawing the leftists.\textsuperscript{28} To this effect, the rightist elites drove a wedge between Chiang and Wang, and cultivated anti-Communist sentiment within the KMT right. While Bate blames a rightist conspiracy here, namely the Western Hills rightists and their sympathizers throughout the country, this is difficult to prove. Nevertheless, there is evidence to support this claim.

Chiang Kai-shek was indeed widely and even enthusiastically supported by rightist groups like the Western Hills Faction, the Blue Shirts, and the CC Clique. These groups were ideologically similar to Chiang, in that they believed in centralized, militaristic government from the top. Of course, these factions were not interchangeable. Chiang himself advocated the restoration of traditional values while modernizing the nation under a militaristic party-state created by the KMT, while different groups had significant differences in their treatment of the past, their conception of the KMT, and their visible connections to Chiang.\textsuperscript{29} While the conservative CC Clique was a visible and culturally conservative part of the KMT government, the quasi-fascist and highly modernist Blue Shirts operated outside the government while pledging personal allegiance to Chiang, who claimed not to know of them. While these groups had their differences, they formed a strong rightist bloc in favor of Chiang.

Conversely, Wang was disadvantaged as a KMT leftist in that the leftist

\textsuperscript{28} Bate, \textit{Wang Ching-wei: Puppet or Patriot}, 91.
factions blended and indeed were often subsumed by the Communist elements within the United Front. While Chiang commanded the loyalty of the right-wing militarists, Wang was not radical enough to inspire loyalty among the Communists, nor was he an active believer in Marxist principles. Indeed, Wang followed Sun in proclaiming Chinese national sovereignty as non-negotiable while advocating a broad societal revolution that drew upon all classes, rather than just the proletariat. While later interpretations of Karl Marx (1818-1883) gave rise to state socialism, at this point in time the Communist movement was largely international. This focus on internationalism and the unique revolutionary role of the proletariat were at odds with Sun’s codified lectures on the Three People’s Principles, and therefore at odds with Wang’s conception of national reconstruction.

Unlike his tenuous Communist allies, Wang spoke not of destroying bourgeois superstructure and empowering the proletariat—to say nothing of destroying feudal superstructure and empowering the peasantry—but of national reconstruction. Reconstruction (建設 jianshe, lit. construction) is one of Wang’s leitworts, and is indeed key to understanding his political philosophy. Of course, this was not his unique idea (thinkers as far removed from Wang as Qing reformer Li Hongzhang (1823-1901) and international Communist Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) also saw reconstruction as China’s primary goal), but his interpretation of reconstruction is particular in its emphasis on a leftist understanding of the Three People’s Principles.

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as key to reviving China.\textsuperscript{31} Wang’s basic argument for reconstruction rested on righting the proverbial ship. To Wang, China was a poor nation largely because of Manchu misrule and foreign (especially Western) imperialism. By creating a strong Chinese nation-state with modern industries, political institutions, and defenses, the Nationalists would be able to right these historical wrongs and restore China as a great power and a good place to be more generally. To this effect, countless nationalists and revolutionaries studied foreign philosophies and sciences to learn what made modernized states like Britain and Japan so powerful, and critically to learn how they got there. One of Wang’s major takeaways from his studies in Japan and France was that a modern nation must have modern infrastructure and institutions. Sun and Wang both saw Japan’s rapid modernization as reason for optimism, in that it showed drastic modernization was possible and could be done quickly. There were downsides, though. Now there was a modern Japanese empire on China’s stoop, looking to expand. Therefore, Wang advocated not for a violent and destructive revolution, like the Communists did, but for an urgent project of peaceful infrastructure construction and political modernization.\textsuperscript{32} This ideological split was one source of cleavage between the Communists and the KMT left, but it was not the only one.

Apart from the ideological split between the KMT left and the CCP, there

\textsuperscript{32} Wang, \textit{China’s Problems and Their Solution}, 5.
were also several practical reasons for a split. While it ought to be noted that Wang left the country after the Zhongshan Incident, as is agreed upon by both sides—with differing justifications—he returned to establish the National Government in the Wuhan cities in early 1927. This government was established largely to rein in the militarist right led by Chiang Kai-shek, which had grown greatly in power during the Northern Expedition. The Wuhan government drew ready support from the Communists, who had faced increasing persecution and distrust from the right wing. However, Wang clearly did not inspire loyalty in the rightist factions, as generals like Bai Chongxi (1893-1966) enthusiastically massacred Communists in Shanghai (which had been seized by the Communists and their labor union allies in the name of the United Front) and supported Chiang’s rival government in Nanjing. Facing heavy pressure, Wang caved and broke with the Communists, conducting his own purge to draw the ire of the rightists away from him. He had lost the gambit, and the KMT left-wing would not be a major force in national politics for years to come.

Wang Jingwei was undoubtedly a nationalist. Not even his rivals contest this, as will be seen in Chapter Three. And yet, this ardent nationalist, who at one point had the confidence of Sun Yat-sen and indeed the highest office within the Kuomintang, would be labeled a 漢奸 hanjian—a harsh term perhaps best translated as “traitor to the Han people”—after defecting from Chungking and becoming the President of the Reorganized National Government in Nanjing in 1940. Decreed as nothing more than a Japanese puppet by Chiang and the Western Allies, Chairman Wang spoke in strong tones of defeating the Anglo-American Imperialists, defeating the red bandits, defeating the corrupt warlord Chiang Kai-shek, and establishing the
Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. How did this happen? Did Wang’s heart grow cold, giving into promises of power from Japanese envoys? Did Wang grow greedy, and hope to personally profit off the pacification of the eastern heartlands? Or did Wang truly believe that cooperation with Japan was in the best interests of China? To understand Wang’s decision, and to understand his various rivals’ interpretation thereof, we ought to discuss the Three People’s Principles and their place in Chinese nationalism in the 1930s.
Chapter Two: The Three People’s Principles and Politics in the 1920s

Section I: Sun Yat-sen and the Dawn of Chinese Nationalism

Before we begin discussing different Chinese nationalist narratives, particularly as they relate to Sun Yat-sen’s political ideology and how Wang Jingwei interpreted his national duty, a working definition of nationalism is needed. According to Benedict Andersen, nationalism is best conceived of as an “imagined community” of people with some similar cultural background or political reality.33 This definition of nation is broad and allows for the easy separation of the nation from the state; moreover, this nation is not bound by the limits of dialectic historiography, as is Eric Hobsbawm’s conception of nationalism. To Hobsbawm, nationalism is a political tool that serves as social glue in the absence of the strong religious and village ties that traditionally provided the force for social and cultural cohesion. It is thus necessarily a product of the urbanization and industrialization that mark the bourgeois capitalist stage in history—however, certain proto-nationalisms can be seen even in the feudal era, as he says was the case for Russia and France.34 Both conceptions of nationalism have something to offer us here: Andersen clearly illustrates the fuzzy and shifting nature of any nationalism, and Hobsbawm provides a convincing explanation for the clear historical trend in the promotion of nationalism following industrialization and in the political uses thereof. Taking both theorists into account, let us propose that nationalism is an imagined communalistic ideology that

generally emerges as a result of industrialization and secularization, although often with deeper historic and cultural roots. While this is hardly a perfect definition, it will work for discussing Wang and Chinese nationalism in the early twentieth century.

Chinese nationalism is complicated in that it is a modern phenomenon that can be traced back largely to the waning years of the Qing Dynasty, yet the prerequisite cultural and historic traditions are powerful long before the rise and promotion of a unifying national ideology. Sun, Chiang, Wang, Mao: despite their many differences, they all have a notion of Chinese identity that stretches back millennia. While the dynastic histories and mythic sage-kings of Chinese civilization are often invoked in the construction of an ancient national entity, no dynasty other than the Qing could possibly be considered the wellspring of Chinese nationalism according to our definition as China had not begun to industrialize until the late Qing. While the Southern Song (1127-1279) was a period of great economic growth, including such hallmarks of modernity like paper currency and the rise of consumer culture, the lack of mechanization precludes the Southern Song economic boom from being considered a period of actual industrialization. Even Qing industrialization was a slow process, limited primarily to a few large cities, that was nowhere near complete by the abdication of Pu Yi in 1911.

Indeed, it appears that the Qing Dynasty cannot be considered a Chinese nation either, at least according to the definition I’ve proposed. This is not simply because the Qing was a Manchu dynasty, though this point is certainly worthy of consideration. If nationalism is a sense of belonging, and the state actively fosters this sense of belonging, then it would appear that the Qing did little to foster a Qing
nationalism. While the late Qing government took steps like the creation of a national flag, anthem, and the pursuit of industrial and institutional modernization, this was too little, too late. Indeed, the Qing government named “The Cup of Solid Gold” (鞏金甌 gōng jīn’ōu) the first national anthem only a week before the Wuchang Uprising sent the dynasty into a death spiral. Moreover, the Manchu rulers of the early and mid-Qing dynasty made few efforts, if any, to cultivate a broader Qing identity. Instead, the Manchu court issued laws segregating non-Manchus from Manchu districts of large cities and forcing Han subjects to display submission and inferiority before the Manchus through such visible signs as men shaving their head and wearing the Manchu queue. While the court’s imposition of a mandatory symbol of loyalty to the throne could be taken as the cultivation of a common identity, this was the cultivation of a subject mentality rather than the cultivation of national consciousness. Admittedly, the difference between the two is less than clear. What I find key, however, is that the Manchu court treated Manchus favorably by providing pensions to bannermen regardless of military ability, segregated non-Manchus from large portions of cities, organized ethnic banners and armies instead of a broader imperial army, and forced Han people to adopt a hairstyle that disrespected cultural traditions. \(^{35}\) If this could be considered nationalism, it seems more of a Manchu nationalism apart from the rest of the empire than a broader Qing nationalism.

Judging by these actions, it is apparent that the court did not try to establish a

common identity with which to secure the affection and loyalty of the people. Therefore, there was no real Qing nationalism to speak of, only competing ethnic nationalisms within and often opposed to the Qing Empire. The most prominent of these nationalisms were Manchu nationalism, described above, and Han nationalism, which often took the form of anti-Qing secret societies and violence targeting Manchus, as the ethnic cleansing campaigns of the Taiping rebels indicates. The existence of powerful anti-dynastic nationalisms indicates that the Qing court did not do a very good job of cultivating a Qing identity, and so this supports the notion that the Qing Empire was not a Chinese nation. Moreover, the potential argument for a top-down promulgation of dynastic nationalism is further undermined by the fact that the Qing economy was not yet industrialized and the society not yet urbanized to the extent that it would require a national identity for social harmony, at least according to the Marxist framework of Hobsbawm’s nationalism. While there was great opposition to foreign interference in China and great outbursts of rage evident in incidents like the Boxer Rebellion, this was only the seed of a domestic, grassroots nationalism that would be cultivated by overseas Chinese dissidents like Sun Yat-sen and other political bigwigs in the early twentieth century.

Sun Yat-sen, anti-Qing revolutionary and “father of the nation”, is critical to understanding Chinese nationalism. Revered as the “father of the nation” by KMT loyalists, Sun offered the first and most cohesive plan for the intentional establishment of a modern Chinese nation-state. While he was largely absent during the critical years of the late 1890s, as radical nationalism broke out in the form of xenophobic violence in North China and the foreign powers carved ever larger
domains, Sun made his name known overseas through tireless promotion of his nationalist Revive China Society and skillful self-promotion.\textsuperscript{36} One example of Sun’s skills in narrative control is the elevation of his group’s 1895 attack on Canton to the status of a revolutionary insurrection, despite the lack of success or popular support—Marie-Claire Bergère describes the insurrectionists not as Sun’s revolutionary patriots, but as gangsters.\textsuperscript{37} Indeed, the elevation of the secret societies to those of revolutionary, nationalist movements was one of Sun’s greatest spin victories, as these secret societies were often more concerned with the individual welfare of each member than with collective societal good. Indeed, Bergère goes so far to say that most secret societies were simply gangs with the trappings of Ming restoration or national strength through extreme xenophobia and isolation, but this is perhaps a less than charitable view. The Revive China Society, while perhaps not as heroic as Sun Yat-sen described it, did hold political values and worked to realize them.

Of course, the Revive China Society was only one of several nationalist dissident groups in underground politics during the end of the Qing Dynasty. It wasn’t until the creation of the Tongmenghui (the United League), with the radical Huaxinghui’s leader Huang Xing (1874-1916) pledging the group’s loyalty and cooperation to the RCS that Sun had a powerful political base. The RCS was comprised mostly of overseas Chinese, being founded in Hawaii in 1894, and therefore its members possessed a more international outlook: the members’ oaths were taken on a Bible, and the founding statement of the society called for the

\textsuperscript{36} Bergère, \textit{Sun Yat-sen}, 43.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 43.
establishment of a modern Chinese republic in order to save the Zhonghua (中華) nation. The Zhonghua nation, more famously Romanized as Chunghwa, was not just a Han nation; rather, the Zhonghua nation hearkened back to a mythic common predecessor of the “five stocks” (Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Muslim, and Tibetan), one people whose ways of life diverged as a result of climate and geography.\(^{38}\) However, in practice this looked more like the imposition of Han culture onto the other four than a merging of the five. This equation of Han and Zhonghua, which itself was often translated as “Chinese”, is evident in Frank Price’s authoritative translation of Sun’s first Canton lecture on nationalism.\(^{39}\) In any case, this creation and promulgation of a new common identity was a direct result of Sun’s thoughts on nationalism and belonging, and was integral for the modernization of China.

Also key was political modernization. The founders reimagined the Chinese nation-state, putting forth a model heavily influenced by Western liberal democracies like the United States and later Japan, where Sun would spend several years and where he and Huang Xing came into regular contact. Not only would the state itself be restructured, but the Chinese national heritage itself had to be brought in step with the modern times, as exemplified best by the efforts of the radical Confucians Kang Youwei (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao (1873-1928). Unfortunately, reinterpretation of the classics was a dangerous gambit at this time, and the Empress Dowager Cixi forced the two scholars into exile after her deposition of the Guangxu Emperor in 1898. However, the damage was done: Kang and Liao would figure prominently into

\(^{38}\) Chiang, *China’s Destiny*, 21.
\(^{39}\) Sun Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People (with Two Supplementary Chapters by President Chiang Kai-shek)*, 3.
later efforts to modernize China without Westernizing it, influencing Sun and Mao Zedong (1893-1976).

While Kang and Liao explored a variety of topics in their writings, we will not be dealing with these thinkers. Most pertinent here is that Sun was heavily influenced by Kang and Li’s radical reinterpretation of Confucius and the Confucian classics. Just as they sought to preserve Chinese political traditions and philosophical values while modernizing them through debate and comparison with modern philosophies, Sun also began emphasizing the importance of preserving elements of traditional culture and society to preserve the national heritage. National heritage itself is a loaded term with different connotations and interpretations among different people, but here we will define it loosely as a certain historical and cultural tradition closely associated with a specific nation (in Andersen’s open sense of the term). In Sun’s words, national heritage can be summed up in the following terms: “common blood”, “livelihood”, “language”, “religion”, and “customs and habits”. To maintain a certain nation, the relevant national heritage must be maintained. This is line with Jiang Qing’s notion of the state as an organic entity with a heritage born of “historical continuity and traditional inheritance”, a conception of the state largely at odds with Hobsbawm’s bourgeois nationalism and itself seemingly informed by thinkers like Naito Konan. Therefore, Sun sought to follow Kang’s lead and not just implement an American federalist or European parliamentary democracy, but rather create a hybrid system that made use of traditional institutions like the censorate and the

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40 Ibid., pp. 3-4.
examination board. This attempt to reconcile modern forms of government like liberal democracy and traditional institutions rooted in the dynastic times is the Nationalist approach to political institution making in a nutshell.

This fusion of Eastern and Western was also made evident in the structure of Sun’s guiding ideology, the Three People’s Principles (三民主義 sanmin zhuyi), collectively forming the basis of so-called Sunist political thought. Having spent a significant amount of time in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan, Sun was introduced to the details of American governance and the structures of other world governments. It is perhaps in the Declaration of Independence that we find the source of Sun’s most powerful influence, but it is important not to overstate this American influence; the People’s Principles were to be the guiding of the new Chinese Republic (中華民國 Zhonghua Minguo), and as such were to preserve the national heritage. To this end, what inspirations and ideas he borrowed from Western philosophers he fit into a domestic framework. This is apparent in his Principles and the familiar yet not identical concepts enumerated within. The first principle, 民族 minzu or “nationalism” as it is generally translated, is the clearest and was at the time the least controversial of Sun’s principles. Nationalism here refers to a racial nationalism far more similar to that of Jiang Qing than Andersen or Hobsbawm, one in which a societal blood flows so long as the culture, language, and other facets of lifestyle remain in practice. Here Chinese identity (中國民族/中華民族 Zhongguo Minzu/Zhonghua Minzu) is more or less interchangeable with Han identity (漢族

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42 Bergère, Sun Yat-sen, 357.
Hanzu) and, while minorities such as the Manchus and the Mongols were recognized, Sun expected them to assimilate into the Zhonghua republic. In this way, while Sun was largely inventing a new Zhonghua nation, he tied it to ancient Han culture and promoted it as the necessary unifying agent that would save China. This emphasis on Han culture as greater Chinese culture was an integral part of Sun’s plan to revive and revitalize China. The importance of nationalism here seems to have emerged from a fear of total foreign domination, and so the promotion of Zhonghua identity was an attempt to unify the country and spur the citizens into action, lest this greater Chinese race go extinct (種滅 zhongmie) or be forever a weak, abused country.

The second principle, 民權 minquan or “the people’s rights/the people’s power” is sometimes translated as democracy, but this is not quite liberal democracy in form or spirit. Indeed, if we consider that Sun believed “We [Chinese] have had too much liberty without any unity and resisting power, because we have become a sheet of lose sand,” it becomes apparent that there is a big gap between American democracy as put forth by the likes of Thomas Jefferson and Chinese democracy as put forth by Sun. In Sun’s Republic, the people cannot be free if the state is not strong as the people of a weak state will be abused by other states. To Sun, the situation in late Qing China was a clear example of this. The priority, then, is national strength, with freedom a result and privilege of living in a well-ordered state.

44 Ibid., 372.
This is not to say that sovereignty did not rest with people, but instead that the individual’s autonomy was made distinct from the people’s autonomy, and was less valuable. Therefore, it is useful to think of minquan as “the people’s power”—the literal meaning of democracy, divorced from modern Western connotations of liberalism and individual rights. As such, the state was to utilize the people in a way that maximized the strength of the nation and the people’s welfare while still respecting individual rights. Sun’s Confucian influences are showing here, as he believed that with the cultivation of national spirit, talented and worthy people would naturally desire to serve the state. While there was some level of equality present in Sun’s Republic, he favored a Kantian meritocratic approach.45 Ideally to Sun, the bright, literally “the first to know and perceive” (先知先覺者 xianzhi xianjuezhe), were privileged more than the average, “those who know and perceive later” (後知後覺者 houzhi houjuezhe), and the ignorant masses, “those who neither know nor perceive” (不知不覺者 buzhi bujuezhe), were more or less passive players in state affairs, following the lead of their betters.46 This is what he termed natural inequality.

Following the development of national consciousness and the empowerment of the people through the implementation of Sun’s Republic, a criterion was needed to measure the success and focus the energies of the government. This criterion would come in the form of the third principle.

The third, and most controversial, of Sun’s principles was the principle of the

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45 Sun, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People (with Two Supplementary Chapters by President Chiang Kai-shek)*, 79.
people’s welfare (民生 minsheng). A vague and layered term that has been interpreted and reinterpreted by those seeking to claim to inherit Sun’s mission of national revival, the people’s welfare is defined in speeches circa 1905 as socialism and chiefly reliant on tax reform implementing the recommendations of the progressive economist Henry George (1839-1897); however, in lectures circa 1924 Sun states “the people’s welfare is simply socialism, also called communism, that is the ideology of the Great Harmony” (民生主義就是社會主義, 又名共產主義, 即是大同主義). What he means by communism here is a matter of some interpretation, with Bergère stating he is referring to a vague, distant communism rooted in ancient conceptions of the Great Harmony (datong) first spelled out by Kang Youwei. She looks to the political situation of the KMT during Sun’s lecture series in 1924 and, making note of the KMT’s Soviet advisor Mikhail Borodin’s (1884-1951) anger towards Sun’s prior lecture on the flaws of Marxism, argues that he was simply using the word “communism” (共産主義 gongchan zhuyi) to appease Borodin and ensure continued Soviet support for the Nationalists.

In any case, Sun’s later conceptions of minsheng were clear and consistent in several key ways: the people’s welfare was best promoted through state socialism and the further centralization and modernization of the Chinese economy, alongside the tax and land reform that lay at the heart of his earlier definitions. Moreover, advancing the people’s welfare means preserving the stability of the state, or as Sun phrases it, “If society makes progress, that can only be because of the harmony

between the economic interests of society’s multitudes.” Indeed, this emphasis on social harmony also reinforces Sun’s reliance on the service conception of authority to legitimize the Republic: while an egalitarian state is legitimate so long as the majority approves of it, a hierarchical state or authoritarian state is only justified in that the people perceive practical returns, say per capita purchasing power, as greater than they would be in an egalitarian state. This attention to public welfare is succinctly tied to the Chinese national heritage by Sun’s prominent slogan “When the Great Way was in practice, all under Heaven was for the common good” (大道之行也，天下為公). By invoking ancient texts to legitimate his modernizing political agenda and insisting upon the importance of maintaining cultural continuity, Sun positioned himself as a domestic Chinese revolutionary, rather than an outsider imposing foreign values. This is key to understanding the Nationalist party line of Chinese modernity through the implementation of the People’s Principles: nationalism, non-liberal democracy, and the people’s welfare.

Section II: Chiang Kai-shek and the Political Reality of the Nanjing Era

Sun Yat-sen was the center of the Nationalist Party in the early 1920s, not only ideologically but also politically. However, while Sun himself favored the intellectuals surrounding him, particularly those like Wang Jingwei, Song Jiaoren (1882-1913), and other such revolutionary figures who were a driving force in shaping and promoting the Three Principles of the People, control of the KMT did not fall into their hands. Instead, the young Commandant of Whampoa Academy, Chiang

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Kai-shek, took it for himself. How did this happen? Let us consider the unrest of the 1910s. After the assassination of Song Jiaoren in March of 1913 and the attempted imperial restoration of the Beiyang General and President of the Republic Yuan Shikai in 1915, the fledgling Republic plunged into a chaotic period of war and disunity. In this environment, control of the military was the one main requirement for political power. As might be expected, the Nationalist’s republican movement was hamstrung by this nation-wide devolution into warlord rule, and when Sun reestablished the Party in Canton in 1920, the development of the KMT’s military abilities was key concern. Seeking to bolster the strength of Nationalist armed forces so that he would be able to defeat the northern warlords and unify China under the auspices of the Republic, Sun and the KMT Central Committee accepted support from the Soviet Union in establishing a military academy, which would serve several key functions: military training, cultivation of national spirit, and cultivation of individual morality.⁴⁹

Indeed, the Whampoa Military Academy was a critical institution of the Nationalist Party, and as such control of the Academy was an honor personally assigned by Sun in his capacity as Premier of the Nationalist Party. Chiang Kai-shek, Commandant of the Whampoa Military Academy and the garrison commander of Canton, managed to seize control of the party through the declaration of martial law and the political sidelining of the establishment favorite Wang Jingwei. Known as a virulent anticommmunist and a zealous nationalist, Chiang would position himself as

⁴⁹ Sun, San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People (with Two Supplementary Chapters by President Chiang Kai-shek), 285.
the leader of the KMT’s conservative faction, with Wang framing himself as the leader of the party’s leftist faction—as is evidenced by Wang’s 1927 National Government in Hankou incorporating many open and committed Communists. Due largely to his role in the Zaifeng plot and to his close ties with Sun, Wang was elected chairman of the central party council on July 1, 1925, during a KMT convention in Canton. Moreover, as allies in the United Front, the CCP and KMT at this time worked together for the common goal of national unification and reconstruction. As evidenced by the high esteem of Wang, the prominence of Mikhail Borodin in KMT politics, and the general prominence of Soviet advisors in party affairs military and political, leftist sentiment in the party was still significant around the time of Sun’s death in 1925.

Perhaps the most telling account of the political preeminence of the left wing in KMT politics at this time comes from Jay Taylor’s biography of Chiang, The Generalissimo. Taylor paints a portrait of an idealistic young leftist named Chiang Kai-shek who was well-loved by the Whampoa cadets and whose outsider status as a sincere Zhejiang military man in a largely cutthroat Cantonese political circle led to a dramatic about-face. On March 19, 1926, a series of odd events left Chiang suspicious. He had been warned several times that year about growing animosity towards him among the Communists, and suddenly that day the gunboat Zhongshan, captained by a Chinese Communist and advised by a Soviet Communist, was mysteriously anchored off Changzhou Island, the location of the Academy. His

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compatriot Deng Yanda called several times, asking for details about Chiang’s next return to Changzhou. Feeling threatened by the confluence of these odd events, Chiang roused the First Corps, his loyal men, and declared martial law in Canton in the early hours of March 20. Though this order was rescinded after only a day, the mass arrest of Communists and shutdown of the city illustrated the civilian government’s weakness, and was a landmark moment in the transformation of Chiang from a leftist soldier to a fiercely anticommunist dictator. Moreover, this decisive military crackdown allowed Chiang to purge the KMT, still largely limited to Canton and the surrounding area, of Communist influence and to thus weaken the leftist wing of the party. Depicted by Taylor as a catalyst in the ideological transformation of a young leftist to a fascistic figure, the Zhongshan Incident was a major step in Chiang’s consolidation of power. He would only further ensure his place with his later purge of the Communists and the dissolution of the United Front in April of the next year, his political ascendancy made apparent during his forced retirement and his subsequent return to national politics.

However, before his emergence as the Generalissimo of the Republic, before his appointment as the Commandant of the Nationalists’ premier military academy, when he was still just an ambitious officer, Chiang’s political rise was no foregone conclusion. The KMT Left was a powerful coalition, and the Soviet advisors had a large influence on the direction of the party. This is why one of Chiang’s first moves in securing his own safety and status during the Zhongshan Incident was to weaken the hold of the Third Communist International (hereafter referred to as Comintern) on the Nationalists by purging the Revolutionary Army of Communists and by arresting
Soviet advisors like Mikhail Borodin. While this soured relations with the Soviet Union, which at that point was supporting the United Front of the KMT and the CCP, Chiang was too dependent on the Soviets to fully cut ties. It is worth noting that he had earlier spoke kindly of the Communists and even professed personal adherence to Communism, stating “I will die for the Three People’s Principles, namely for Communism” in an address to the cadets of Whampoa Military Academy. However, following the gunboat incident Chiang no longer trusted the Communists, Chinese or otherwise.

Indeed, he now acted against the Communists, and would later write that Sun had allowed the Communists far too much influence on the direction of the KMT and on the Three People’s Principles, as is best demonstrated by Chiang’s reinterpretation of the people’s livelihood. Sun Yat-sen erred in equating minsheng to communism, according to Chiang; in reality, minsheng was about the livelihood of the people in every aspect. To Chiang, social stability and class harmony, with some wealth inequality, was integral to a healthy and prosperous society. This is plainly quite different from advocating the dictatorship of the proletariat and the eventual dissolution of all classes, though both include an equalization of wealth and a progressive attitude. In this way, we see that Chiang’s interpretation of the People’s Principles, which regarded “The lectures of the Principle of Nationality…a manual on Chinese culture and ethics; those on the Principle of People’s Rights one on Chinese politics and law; and those on the Principle of People’s Livelihood one on Chinese economy and society,” were still close to Sun’s codified, Soviet-influenced Principles

51 Ibid., 54.
that were formally detailed in a series of lectures in Canton, 1925. It would seem that Chiang could not diverge too greatly from the party line without harming his claim to Sun’s legacy, or that he sincerely believed in the codified People’s Principles.

As a way of strengthening his own claims to Sun’s legacy, he downplayed the importance of communism and the Soviet Union in developing Sun’s thought in his 1956 work *Soviet Russia in China*. “Dr. Sun had received a Western education which enabled him to reappraise the cultural assets of his own people in the light of modern political thinking,” Chiang wrote, finding value in traditional Chinese political institutions such as a merit-based civil service and an independent censorate; however, “his basic political philosophy undoubtedly came from the ideals of the American and French Revolutions.” By downplaying the role of the Soviet Union and advisors like Borodin, who as a result of Chiang’s installment of the anticommunist Hu Hanmin as Premier and the aforementioned Zhongshan Incident was arrested and deported in 1927, Chiang undermined Communist claims to Sun’s legacy. At the same time, Chiang strengthened the image of Sun as a democratic patriot by drawing comparisons to Abraham Lincoln and by emphasizing Sun’s Western education. His translation of the People’s Principles here is notable: “The Three Principles are Nationalism, Political Democracy and People’s Livelihood”.

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52 Sun, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People (with Two Supplementary Chapters by President Chiang Kai-shek)*, 265.
53 Chiang Chung-cheng [Chiang Kai-shek], *Soviet Russia in China: A Summing-up at Seventy*, trans. Madame Chiang Kai-shek [Soong May-ling was known by a variety of names, including Madame Chiang Kai-shek], (NY: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), 4.
54 Ibid., 4.
Whereas prior works of translation, such as Frank Price’s 1927 translation, primarily describe *minquan* as the “Principle of the People’s Sovereignty”, here Soong May-ling (1897-2003) translates it as “Political Democracy”, a striking change considering Chiang’s dependence on Western democracies like the United States for military and financial support. As columnist Gordon C. Chang notes in a review of Rayna Mitter’s *Forgotten Ally*, Chiang was often known in the American media as “General Cash My Check”.

This reinterpretation of the Three People’s Principles and of Sun’s influences was not without basis, but it was plainly informed by Chiang’s deep personal hatred of the Chinese Communist Party and his political circumstances. While his interpretations differed mostly by degree, this departure had large consequences throughout Chiang’s political career. Ideologically, these repercussions are also apparent in Chiang’s interpretation of *minsheng*. One aspect of the people’s livelihood is mental health, with any well-ordered Chinese state necessarily instilling proper thought and morals into its citizens through universal, lifelong education. To this effect, the “Russian Communist global imperium” and their Chinese Communists “vassals” were instilling poisonous thought in the Chinese masses and that the continued tolerance of this corrupting influence would further weaken China and hamper the KMT’s goal of national reconstruction.

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55 Sun, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People (with Two Supplementary Chapters by President Chiang Kai-shek)*, 77.
Sun, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People (with Two Supplementary Chapters by President Chiang Kai-shek)*, pp. 303, 309.
the people’s livelihood after the loss of the mainland, Chiang writes:

Our party, the Kuomingtang, must consider the fine arts as a vital problem in social and cultural reconstruction...we must see to it that every item in our future projects of social and cultural reconstruction must emphasize the basic importance of the underlying substance and be made as pleasing to the eyes as possible. We must, above all, rid our nation of all traces of terrorism and violence perpetrated by the Russian aggressors and their Chinese Communist puppets, and extol the grand virtues of loyalty, faithfulness and simplicity. 58

Plainly, entertainment and art were significant to Chiang for their political uses. However, while Chiang charged the “materialism” of the Communists with breaking down social mores and glorifying savagery in the name of revolution, his own real-world attempt at citizen cultivation was less than successful.

Even before Chiang wrote his two supplementary chapters on the principle of minsheng, he took the people’s education—or, less charitably, indoctrination—as an essential component of national revitalization. Consider Soong May-ling’s discussion of Chiang’s motivations in launching the New Life Movement in a June, 1935 Forum article titled “New Life in China”: as the people of China had not had the opportunity to engage in public life in the days of the Qing or the warlords, they were not educated since there was no need or benefit to the ruling class in educating the masses, who were interested primarily in the preservation of their own power and status. Having liberated the people from the warlords during the Northern Expedition,

58 Ibid., pp. 308-309.
Chiang and the Nationalists found them ignorant and unfit to act as citizens of the Republic. In Soong’s words, their thought was backwards, their conduct rude, their hygiene poor. To rectify this, the New Life Movement promoted several key values among the masses so that they may become active, good citizens: 禮 li, translated by Madame Chiang as “courtesy”; 義 yi, translated by Madame Chiang as “duty or service”, both internal and external; 廉 lian, translated as a clear demarcation of rights and their boundaries, or, “in other words, honesty”; 志 zhi, translated as “high-mindedness and honor”. Through state enforcement and cultivation of these traditional virtues, Chiang and Soong believed that the people of China would once again learn proper morals, and then be able to serve as citizens in the new Chinese Republic.

While the New Life Movement is distinctly the work of Chiang Kai-shek and Soong May-ling, Sun’s influence remains apparent. In seeking to restore China to greatness, the government must promote what Sun described as the origin of Chinese cultural and national greatness, that is traditional Confucian values. However, while Soong reiterates Sun’s words on the excellence of Chinese political and moral philosophy, she emphasizes that these values are to be cultivated through concrete action that takes modernity and the reality of China’s political situation into account. Many resented the New Life Movement, which they associated with the suppression of basic individual liberties like speech or clothing choice, fascistic blue-shirt squads enforcing New Life standards, and the project’s prominent propaganda component.

59 May-ling Soong Chiang (Soong Mei-ling/Madame Chiang Kai-shek), War Messages and Other Selections, (Hankow: China Information Committee, 1938), 306.
The leftist press often mocked the vague ideals and shoddy execution of the New Life Movement, as can be seen by Soong’s chilly response to the “scoffers who claim that the New Life Movement means only the forceful buttoning up of one’s coat by some over-zealous policemen”, but their criticisms were not unique. Regardless of its efficacy and public reception, the New Life Movement is significant in that it is a clear example of Chiang implementing ideologically-based policy aimed at strengthening the nation through the citizens directly, albeit in an oppressive fashion.

Although Chiang Kai-shek had leftist sensibilities when he was younger, he emerged as the voice of the KMT right-wing in the late 1920s. This made his grasp on the legacy of Sun Yat-sen, whose public support for Communism was made clear in his Canton lecture on minsheng, more tenuous, and thus threatened his high status within the Kuomintang. Therefore, Chiang made great efforts in reinterpreting Sun’s Principles and distancing Sun from Borodin and the Soviet Union, as evidenced by his two chapters on the people’s livelihood, his jeremiads against the “Russian imperialists”, and his wife Soong May-ling’s appeals to the outside world. During the rule of Chiang, the leftists’ past and present were marginalized, in hopes of securing Chiang’s vision of a strong China.

Section III: The CCP, the United Front, and Communist Nationalism

While the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) plainly won out in the end, the late 1920s were a period of great hardship for the party. Purged by Chiang Kai-shek after the labor strikes of April 1927 in Shanghai, purged further by Wang Jingwei in

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60 Ibid., 307.
Hankou later that year, the CCP, which had up till this point been a key part and player in the national government, was forced from the public sphere and the urban centers into the underground. The CCP had been incorporated into the national government as “a bloc within” the KMT coalition, to use the words of Comintern’s man on the ground in early 1920s China, H. Sneevliet (1883-1942). In the eyes of Sneevliet, who was also known by his pseudonym Maring, “the KMT was not a coherent political party but a coalition of parties, and thus the CCP could join as the party of the proletariat and use its inside position to transform the KMT into a Communist revolutionary force.” Therefore, through Sneevliet’s personal connections with Sun Yat-sen and some thorough persuasion on both sides, the fledgling CCP joined forces with Sun’s recently reestablished Kuomintang in 1922 as a condition of the Sun-Joffe Accords, and would later officially form the United Front with the KMT as part of the Northern Expedition. However, this partnership was largely one of convenience, with significant ideological disputes existing between the various factions of the Nationalist umbrella; even the socialist Sun Yat-sen was largely in disagreement with the Communists, to say nothing of militarists like Chiang Kai-shek and classical liberals like Hu Hanmin.

One ideological rift apparent from the start was the end goal of Sun’s reforms and the end goals of the Communists. The CCP general Lo Fu, explaining the history of CCP-KMT cooperation to reporter Edgar Snow in Bao’an in 1936, comments on this basic distinction. While Sun aimed to “recover China’s sovereign independence”

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and “revitalize the nation” through the application of his Three People’s Principles, the Communists sought a proletarian revolution that would lead to the many millions of China joining the international Communist movement, with the distant goal of establishing the workers’ paradise. Moreover, Sun sought to strengthen the state and maintain what he termed “true equality”—that is, equality of opportunity with a fluid class system reflecting “natural endowments of intelligence and ability”—while the Communists sought the dictatorship of the proletariat and the eventual dissolution of the state; this only further illustrates the dissimilarity between the two ideologies and explains the mutual lack of respect for the other side after Sun’s death. It is worth noting that at least some Communists, like Wang Fanxi (1907-2002) and his Peking comrades, found Sun’s lectures on “the ‘Three People’s Principles’—nationalism, democracy, and the people’s livelihood—too laughable for words”.

However, while their long-term goals differed dramatically, the short-term goals of Sun and the Communists as represented by Comintern advisors Adolph Joffe (1883-1927) and H. Sneevliet aligned closely. One of Sun’s major criticisms of Chinese communists was that they were applying this Western political ideology to a situation where it was not relevant, and that China was not the industrialized bourgeois capitalist state that Marx explicitly described as the setting for a proletarian revolution. China, Sun believed, was not a place where rich capitalists exploited the workers.

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63 Sun, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People (with Two Supplementary Chapters by President Chiang Kai-shek)*, 82.
workers. In fact, he argued that China had no rich capitalists, with all wealthy Chinese poor compared to the industrialists and financiers of such bourgeois imperialist societies like Britain and Japan. Moreover, China was an agricultural society, and had no large proletariat to speak of. Joffe agreed with Sun, and it was therefore stipulated in the very first point of their agreement that Communism was not, at this point, right for China.\(^6^5\) The most pressing matter facing China, as repeatedly stated by Sun, was national unification, and to this end the Soviet Union agreed to help the KMT by recognizing the KMT as the vanguard of the national revolution and by providing organizational, monetary, and military assistance. The Soviets would go on the help establish the Whampoa Military Academy and helped Sun organize the KMT on the Leninist democratic-centralist model.

While the Sun-Joffe Accords formally linked the Nationalists and the Communists, this did not mean that the differences between the two sides were bridged, or even that they managed to work productively together. Indeed, Communist historian Alexander Pantsov notes that residual tensions between the KMT and the CCP over the Canton Communist Party’s support of the federalist general Chen Jiongming (1878-1933) in Sun and Chen’s 1922 struggle were still very much apparent in 1923, with Chen Duxiu calling the actions of the “Guangzhou comrades…a serious mistake” in a report to the Third Party Congress that June.\(^6^6\)


Moreover, Comintern itself urged the Chinese cadres to maintain some degree of independence, hence Sneevliet’s famous “bloc within” approach. Along with maintaining Communist principles in theory and continuing to foment revolution among the workers and peasants of China, the CCP was also to nudge the KMT in the direction of an explicit Sino-Soviet anti-imperialist alliance. The distance between the Communists and the KMT base was reinforced from above by Comintern and later by the Central Council of Kuomintang, under the influence of Chiang Kai-shek.

The *Zhongshan* Incident, otherwise known as the Canton Coup, is not just significant in explaining the rise of Chiang from Whampoa Commandant to KMT leader; it also perhaps the first significant break between the Communists and the Nationalists after the Sun-Joffe Accords of January, 1923. Indeed, it is worth noting that the foreign press at this time reported on the incident as an intra-party affair of the Chinese Communists. The New York Times, in an article titled “Canton Coup Splits Reds: One Faction Jails Others and Russians are Reported Killed”, stated that “the Red General Chang Kai-shek [sic]” had led an intra-party coup to consolidate his own power.67 That the KMT and CCP were at this point still a single entity is apparent in foreign perception of the incident as an intra-party affair, with Chiang the latest and most sly of the Red militarists. When we consider that Chiang had been chosen by Sun to study the Soviet system of governance in Moscow and would later send his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, to learn from the Soviets at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), it becomes clear that there few visible

distinctions between the factions of the United Front at this point. Moreover, that so little detail is spent discussing the politics of the affair is further evidence of the apparent unity of the two up until this point. While we discussed earlier Chiang’s possible political motivations for executing the coup, it remains unclear how much stock we should put in Taylor’s depiction of the incident as a transformative moment for a young leftist Chiang; in any case, the Canton Coup was the first violent suppression of the Communist bloc by the right-wing Nationalist faction emerging around Chiang and Sun’s revolutionary cohort.

It certainly was not the last, nor was it the most dramatic. While Chiang imposed heavy restrictions on Communists in the United Front, expelling all Communists from the military, many senior members from the political branch and setting limits on Communist representation even at lower levels, it wasn’t until the end of the Northern Expedition that Chiang fully began purging the KMT of Communists. The Purge of April 1927 was a direct response to the massive labor strikes in Shanghai, organized by the Communists, that paralyzed China’s largest economic center. General Bai Chongxi, the Hui Guangxi Warlord then-allied with Chiang, declared in an interview with the international media that:

The Communists within the Kuomintang have been found guilty of plotting against the Government and opposing the goal of nationalism. The essential differences between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party lie in the fact that the Kuomintang is trying to co-ordinate all classes in China, and seeking to emancipate them, while the Communists are favoring certain sections of
society. One party is constructive, the other is destructive.\(^\text{68}\)

Taking Bai to speak for the KMT-right wing, led by Chiang but encompassing several rightist factions, the KMT Right viewed the CCP as an anti-national party. Why?

There are several reasons, implicit and explicit. First, Leninist Communism (still highly influential in the mid-1920s) is international (state socialism being a later Stalinist interpretation) and anti-national, at least according to conceptions of the bourgeois “nation”. Second, Communists privilege the proletariat over the peasantry, the artisans, the industrialists, and the scholars. As Sun described a China in which all were poor and all suffering from the abuses of imperialism, all classes were therefore in need of liberation. These are the two main ideological justifications for purging the Communists from the United Front and removing them from any legitimate (read: approved by the KMT) political platform.

Of course, there were other reasons for Chiang’s betrayal of his Communist allies. The Communists, as directed by Comintern, had continued to foment the spirit of class revolution in the countryside and among the small urban proletariat in developed cities like Shanghai. Their efforts had been particularly successful in Jiangxi and Hunan, with a full-blown peasant rebellion breaking out in 1926. During the peasant rebellion, the landlords and petty gentry of the Xiaoxiang area were cut down by peasant mobs, who confiscated their property and attempted to put it to common use. The peasant rebellions were in part credited to local organizer and

\(^{68}\) “CHIANG GROUP SPEED WAR AGAINST REDS: Shanghai Commander Issues a Scathing Denunciation of Communists, Telling Plots. 100 KILLED IN CANTON RAIDS Moderates Disarm Labor Unions There After Fighting in Streets -- Protect Foreign Section”, \textit{New York Times}, 4-17-1927, 1.
observer Mao Zedong, who reported back to party headquarters news of the peasants’ revolutionary potential—controversial news, given Marxist-Leninist thought labeling the peasantry a most reactionary element. However, while the KMT knew the CCP was agitating for revolution in the countryside and officially condoned it to some extent, that many land-holding officers witnessed the violent upheaval firsthand during the Northern Expedition fanned fears of large-scale peasant rebellion engulfing the country among the militarist clique of the KMT.  

This fear of peasant rebellion is one explanation for Chiang’s turn. Another, perhaps ideologically-skewed, explanation is that Chiang Kai-shek was bribed by the Shanghai industrialists whose factories were disrupted and business impeded by the workers’ strikes, to crack down hard on the Communists and to break the labor movement before it grew any stronger. In any case, to the great anger of the Kuomintang Left, Chiang came down hard on the strikers and on the Communist Party, with General Bai being dubbed “the hewer of Communist heads” for his brutal massacre of Communists in the streets of Shanghai. This led to the Wuhan/Nanjing Split, and the retreat of the Communists from public view.

The Communist response to the massacres was largely one of shock and betrayal at both the international and local levels. Wang Fanxi, Party member and student at Peking University at the time, expressed his and his comrades’ disbelief in

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what they saw as Chiang’s backstabbing of the Communists through the Shanghai Massacre and the arrest and execution of the Peking Communists, among them Li Dazhao (1888-1927):

We wanted an explanation for what had happened and instruction on what our attitude towards Chiang should be in the future. But the only explanation I could get from the Peking committee was that Chiang had capitulated to imperialism and the rightists and betrayed the revolution. ⁷¹

According to Wang’s narrative, Li Dazhao had been arrested in the international Legation Quarter of Beijing by the forces of Zhang Zuolin; as no Chinese military forces were allowed in the Legation Quarter, to Wang this implied that Zhang, the Warlord of Manchuria, had cut a deal with the Japanese, who exerted great influence within the quarter and had a recent history of imperial designs on China’s territory. Following the capture of the Peking Communists, Zhang was unsure of how to handle these prisoners, and was leaning towards long term imprisonment in Mukden until he was advised by Chiang Kai-shek to execute them. According to Wang, not only had Chiang violated the terms of Sino-Soviet cooperation, he was now a counter-revolutionary and an ally of the foreign imperialists, who themselves were purging and persecuting Communists for fear of proletarian revolutions in their own industrial slums.

As for the Communist leadership in Moscow, reactions were mixed and explanations lacking. Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) and Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938)

⁷¹ Wang, Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary, 33.
had viewed Chiang as loyal to the terms of the Sun-Joffe Accords and, more importantly, dependent on Soviet aid to reunify China and consolidate the state. Indeed, Stalin himself had overestimated the power of the Communists and the Kuomintang Left within the United Front. As for his appraisal of Chiang, he viewed him as disposable, comparing him to a lemon ready to be squeezed and discarded at his convenience. The Comintern (Third Communist International) officially advised the Chinese Communist Party to lay off peasant agitation and to attempt to maintain relations with the KMT Left, whose capital in Wuhan was the seat of Communist revolutionary activity and whose administration featured prominent Communists and Soviet-cooperation advocates like Soong Ching-ling—widow of the late Sun Yat-sen. Chiang’s “defection” from the United Front did not have deeper implications for the revolutionary movement, according to Stalin, as it was simply the “big bourgeoisie” defecting, not the “petty bourgeoisie” who would guide this capitalist, anti-imperialist movement. However, Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) bashed Stalin and the Comintern, arguing that the CCP was so limited as an inner bloc of the KMT that it was not accomplishing anything. The KMT, composed of and later drawing support from many landowners and urban elites, was itself intertwined with the imperial system, and as such the “peripheral bourgeoisie” posed a conflict of interests for the KMT with regards to total national liberation. While the CCP certainly could work with the KMT, Trotsky insisted it must be as “an independent proletarian party which fights under its own banner and never permits its policy and organization to be dissolved in

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73 Ibid., 103.
the policy and organization of other classes”, lest the revolution be left unrealized and the imperial system in place.\textsuperscript{74}

Ultimately, the Comintern decided to implement Stalin’s strategy of filling the KMT Left with Communist cadres, the formation of a leftist army, and the capture and trial of the treasonous reactionary elements in Nanjing. However, this plan—outlined in a telegram to Comintern representative M. N. Roy (1887-1954), who was allegedly in China for an agricultural development assignment—was not realized, and the Wuhan government of Wang Jingwei initiated its own purge of Communists in June, 1927. While Wang Fanxi notes rumors of reconciliation between Wang Jingwei and Chiang Kai-shek had been floating at street level for some time, it appears that the actual excuse for the break came during a meeting between Comintern representative M. N. Roy and Wang. According to the narrative put forward by historian of Chinese Communism Maria Ristaino, Roy showed Wang the telegram itself and explained the plan in detail, assuming Wang’s dependence on the Soviet Union for the existence of the Wuhan government.\textsuperscript{75} Wang, finding the plan an attack on Chinese sovereignty and KMT supremacy as protected in the Sun-Joffe Accords, showed the telegram to Chiang’s generals and initiated his own crackdown on the Communists.

It is worth noting that Edgar Snow gives a different account of the meeting, stating that Roy showed Wang a Comintern telegram calling for the “limited

\textsuperscript{74} Ristaino, \textit{China’s Art of Revolution: The Mobilization of Discontent, 1927-1928}, 17.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 19.
confiscation of the landlords’ land”. In either case, the sharing of this telegram from Moscow appears at least somewhat responsible for the Communists’ expulsion from the Wuhan regime. Of course, Wang himself was not a Communist and was under increasing pressure from the advancing Nanjing generals to fall in line, so the telegram was perhaps simply a convenient pretext for breaking with the Communists, who were a political liability in the post-Shanghai environment. While the CCP withdrew cadres from important posts as a sign of loyalty to the Wang regime, it was not enough, and the Wang government began the Wuhan Purge.

Following the Wuhan Purge, the Communist Party abandoned its strategy of cooperation with the Nationalists, at least for the time being. Instead, they fled Kuomintang territory, either to the International Settlements of Shanghai and Tianjin, the Soviet Union, or into the distant countryside. Those, like Mao, who opted for the countryside doubled down on rural agitation, mustering forces and inciting insurrections. While the Jiangxi Soviet was successfully established in 1929, this only came after a series of failed uprisings in Nanchang, Changsha, and Canton. Mao Zedong, in his 1936 interview with Edgar Snow in Bao’an, placed most of the blame for the failure of the coalition government on Chen Duxiu and the Comintern advisors, describing Chen as a reactionary who feared the peasants and workers, and whose “petty-bourgeois instincts betrayed him into defeat.” Mao portrayed Chen as the dictator of CCP policy in 1927, and thus assigned the year’s disasters to him. The slander of Chen Duxiu is telling of a larger movement in the Communist narrative:

77 Ibid., 164
with the rise of Mao and his peasant-based anti-imperialism, Trotskyists like Chen and Wang Fanxi would no longer have a place in the party’s narrative except as bourgeois counterrevolutionaries. The rise of Mao with the establishment of the peasant Soviets and the mythical Long March is when mainline Chinese Communism becomes inward-looking, with cosmopolitan internationalism verboten.

The establishment of the Maoist narrative was linked with the establishment of the Chinese Soviets, as this was the first opportunity for the Communists to administer their own territory. During the founding of the Soviets, the first being the Soviet at Cha’ling, a small village on the border of Hunan and Jiangxi, Mao pushed for thought reform as an integral part of national development. According to Mao, the establishment of the Soviets—founded on a “democratic program with a moderate policy, based on slow but regular development”—angered the radical “pustchists”, who believed a “terrorist” policy of land confiscation and the mass murder of landlords was needed to break the old system and to demoralize the landlords and the KMT in general. However, while Mao bemoans the “terrorist” faction, it ought to be noted that the first article of the 1931 Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic calls for the “destruction of feudal remnants”:

> It shall be the mission of the Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic to guarantee the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in the Soviet districts, and to secure the triumph of the dictatorship throughout the whole of China. It shall be the aim of this dictatorship to destroy all feudal

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78 Ibid., 167.
remnants, eliminate the influence of the imperialist powers in China, to unite
China, to limit systematically the development of capitalism, to carry out
economic reconstruction of the state, to promote the class-consciousness and
solidarity of the proletariat, and to rally to its banner the broad masses of poor
peasants in order to effect the transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat. 79

Notably, this constitution only calls for the establishment of a Chinese Soviet, and
that the peasants are viewed to be an integral component of this revolutionary state as
a revolutionary force. In any case, the Soviets were not just the first major
Communist territorial entity in China; they later served a key role in the creation of
the Red Army cult and Mao’s cult of personality—if we lump in the Long March
with the story of the Soviets, then this period becomes even more crucial to Maoist
ideology.

The rise of the Red Army in Communist nationalist narratives largely mirrors
the function of Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary struggles in Nationalist narratives, and
indeed provides a visible foundation for the distinguishing of the Communist Party
from its former allies. Aside from cultural praise in the forms of state-sponsored
military songs and Mao’s own praise poems, such as “The Long March” and
“Breaking Through the First Encirclement”, the cult of the Red Army was largely
propagated through the conduct of the soldiers and their general interactions with the
common people. Red Army soldiers, as the anti-imperialist forces of Chinese

79 “Communist Constitution 1931”, Legal Materials on Tibet,
https://sites.google.com/site/legalmaterialsontibet/home/communist-constitution-
1931.
liberation, were perhaps the most visible part of the Communist movement and, as such, strict guidelines on behavior were established at the 1928 Maobing Conference. These guidelines called for soldiers to “Be courteous and polite to the people and help them when you can” and “Replace all damaged articles” so as to earn the people’s trust.\footnote{Snow, \textit{Red Star over China: The Classic Account of the Birth of Chinese Communism. First Revised and Enlarged Edition}, 1968.} While Mao is perhaps overly charitable in discussing the conduct of his own soldiers and their adherence to this code, it ought to be noted that the soldiers of the People’s Liberation Army were, according to Tibetan academic Dawa Norbu, clean, well-disciplined, and friendly during the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1952.\footnote{Dawa Norbu, \textit{Red Star over Tibet}, (London: Collins, 1974), 110.} While the PLA of the 1950s and the Red Army of the Chinese Soviet years are plainly not entirely interchangeable, there is significant overlap in their methods here. Norbu’s account of PLA conduct in Tibet is valuable in that he, as an advocate of Tibetan independence and critic of Chinese policy with regards to minority regions, had far less reason to be charitable than Mao, and therefore shows that proper conduct was a key element of winning the hearts and minds of the people. Once they had earned some sort of trust from the people, they then began to instill Maoist values.

What were Maoist values, and how do they relate to nationalism? As a Communist, Mao’s conception of nationalism is somewhat different from the more liberally-minded Sun, but there are common elements. However, it is important to note the history behind the breakup of the Communist-Nationalist United Front to understand these differences. Mao’s thought was very much informed by the chaos of
the late 1920s, and thus emphasized military power as the foundation of political power. Moreover, his nationalism was one that expressly privileged a certain group; while Sun’s nationalist reconstruction agenda preached equality of opportunity and “natural” class divisions, Mao’s not only privileged the proletariat, but the peasantry above all. His attitude towards the peasantry is perhaps best summed up in his account of the revolutionary peasant movement in Hunan 1927, describing the peasantry as a selfless, unified class working together to break the control of the old gentry and of feudal customs. While to Sun and Chiang, China’s heritage was something to maintain and use, to Mao “the remnants of feudal culture” were an impediment to the strengthening and the restructuring of China and its poor, oppressed masses. It is with the rise of Mao and the Red Army that the Communist narrative sharply diverged from the KMT narrative, and that their solutions diverged as well. This divergence would inform Wang Jingwei’s subsequent decisions regarding the Communist Party, which had been previously been an ally and would once again form a united government with the KMT in 1936.

Chapter Three: Wang’s Collaboration, or Cooperation?

Section I: Introduction

While Wang Jingwei is perhaps the most famous of the collaborators, along with his Peace Movement and Reorganized Government compatriots Zhou Fohai (1897-1948) and Chen Gongbo (1892-1946), he was hardly the first. Indeed, collaboration was quite common in the occupied territories of China for people of various political persuasions and economic backgrounds. However, Wang is a notable collaborator in that not only was he a high-ranking political figure with revolutionary legitimacy, but also in that he chose to collaborate and indeed loudly advocate for it as mutually beneficial cooperation, unlike many low-level collaborators seeking simply to get by with the powers that be.

While the immediate post-war period was no stranger to retributive violence against major and minor hanjian (traitors to the Han nationality), it is plainly apparent that many of these people felt they were in no position to resist and were simply going with the tide. While the decisions of peasants, workers, and businessmen varied, we will be focusing on why Wang Jingwei, the ardent nationalist with unquestionable revolutionary credentials and the trust of Sun Yat-sen, decided to collaborate with Japan. This decision has earned Wang the hatred of Chinese from a variety of backgrounds, political and otherwise. However, while this decision earned him few friends, it was more or less consistent with his political ideology and goals going as far back as the 1920s.

Section II: KMT/CCP Perceptions

We will begin by discussing how Wang’s former partners in the KMT and
CCP received his decision to collaborate. First, though, we will need to establish the context of how the KMT Right and the CCP came to work together once again. After the Shanghai Purge in April of 1927, the KMT right and the CCP rarely ever saw eye to eye. Crushing the Jiangxi Soviet became a major mission of Chiang’s, while the expedition itself seasoned KMT troops and commanders. After the fall of the Jiangxi Soviet and the Communists’ legendary march to Yan’an and Bao’an, Chiang continued to rally the KMT and the Chinese people against Communism and the CCP. He was so determined to crush the Communists that, even after the Japanese seizure of Manchuria in 1931 and after the subsequent Japanese seizures of Jehol and Charhar, Chiang was still primarily concerned with the Communist threat, which he deemed a greater long-term threat than Japanese invasion. While there were certainly more tangible considerations at play—such as the property of his land-owning supporters and his own personal welfare—Chiang was loudly opposed to the notion of internationalism, of the destruction of old culture, and of proletarian or peasant dictatorship.

The Communists, of course, had no warm feelings for Chiang and the KMT Right. Regrouping in Bao’an, many miles from the capital of their southern Soviet, Mao lambasted Chiang for prioritizing the defeat of the Communists over the expulsion of the Japanese. However, in 1936, the Xi’an Incident would give birth to the next KMT/CCP United Front. While this alliance lasted for some time officially, unofficially conflict between the Communists and the Nationalists would flare up again shortly into the joint war effort. A fundamentally split military command structure, despite the CCP’s superficial allegiance to Generalissimo Chiang and the
KMT, was a source of constant tension and ineffective cooperation between the two parties. Indeed, the two sides were such tenuous “allies” that they engaged in actual organized military conflict during the time of the Second United Front, like the famous encirclement and destruction of the Communist New Fourth Army by the forces of the Chungking KMT General Shangguan Yunxiang in January of 1941. However, while this alliance was tenuous at best and barely existent at worst, the Communists and the Chungking KMT held similar views with regards to collaborators, whom they slandered as traitors and running dogs. This unity of vision is perhaps made most clear in the Chungking propaganda work “Regarding Wang Jingwei’s Betrayal of the Nation” (關於汪精衛叛國 guanyu Wang Jingwei pan’guo), published in 1939 by Chiang Kai-shek and the editors of the Kuomintang Publishing House. However, it also highlights some differences between the factions of the United Front.

“Regarding Wang Jingwei’s Betrayal of the Nation” is a valuable work for two reasons. First, the book, a collection of essays and news excerpts, shows Nationalist and Communist attitudes towards Wang following his departure from Chungking in 1938. Second, the way in which Chiang, the individual authors, and the editors rail against Wang and his collaboration illustrates what mattered in proving political legitimacy from a Nationalist perspective. Indeed, while much of the editors’ argument consists of moral condemnations and mudslinging, they also critique Wang from practical and ideological grounds. To the editors, that China will defeat Japan is a foregone conclusion, with any dissent regarded as self-hating defeatism. This emphasis on racial-nationalism, drawn directly from Sun’s writings on the Principle
of Nationalism and influenced by late nineteenth-century racial theories, is more or less in line with Wang’s own writings. However, the editors of the KMT Publishing House come to a very different conclusion regarding what is best for the Chinese nation.

As stated above, the primary goal of this text is to oppose Wang and his decision to break with the Chungking government in favor of collaboration with Japan. This opposition took both positive and negative forms, mainly the positive case for continued resistance and China’s inevitable victory and the negative form of character assassination vis-à-vis Wang Jingwei, the most prominent peace advocate. It is worth noting that, by the time of Wang’s defection in late December, 1938, Japanese armies had penetrated as far inland as Wuhan and had seized just about every significant coastal city. However, the editors of the KMT Publishing House stated that the war was not just winnable; rather, Chinese victory was preordained. According to the editors, “China has five thousand long years of history and culture, 450 million people, and 12 million square kilometers of land; moreover, China has a strong political party, army, and people. We will absolutely not lose.”83 However, these were simply internal reasons for hope; the editors later cite various external factors and additional internal factors in their assessment of China’s surefire victory prospects. These outside factors include Japanese societal malaise and economic collapse combined with the assistance of outside powers like the United States and

[中國有五千年悠久的歷史文化，有四萬萬五千萬人口，有一千二百徐萬方公里國土，更有弘大組織的各政黨，軍隊人民，絕不會忘。]
the Soviet Union, while size and history are rehashed alongside Nationalist/Communist cooperation and the robust economy of China as internal factors. Of course, the KMT editors neglect to mention that the Chinese government had been unsuccessfully requesting international assistance with regards to Japanese aggression since the Japanese seizure of Manchuria in 1931 and Jehol in 1933, not to mention the weak international response to more distant aggressions like the Japanese seizure of Shandong. Neither is the fact that most industrial areas of the Chinese Republic were occupied by Japanese forces.

While the positive case for resistance rests partly on the inevitability of Chinese victory, the KMT editors take it a step further and make the case for why a Chungking KMT victory is desirable, as opposed to collaboration within the Japanese order—a deal that even its proponents relied heavily upon lesser-evil arguments to argue for. The first point is an appeal to national pride and identity. Fundamentally, the Japanese order was a hierarchical one, one in which Japan played the part of father and China would be forced to play the son alongside Manchuria, to use Chiang’s words. This is to say nothing of Korea, Chiang’s favorite example of Japanese imperial tyranny and the dangers of dealing with the devil. According to Chiang,

the Korean people in their own country have already been drugged to sleep by

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84 Ibid., pp. 102-103.
85 Ibid., 5.
86 Chiang, China’s Destiny, 15.
the enslaving educational policy of their Japanese masters. Korea’s own history and culture have been buried in oblivion; not a trace of national consciousness is now permitted among the Koreans.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 18-19.}

Indeed, Chiang viewed the Korean nation as a pitiful victim of Japanese cultural and economic domination. He warned that this was to be China’s fate as well in such a system. This point, however, is not just an emotional appeal. National sovereignty, while plainly desirable to the self-proclaimed Nationalist Party, was desirable for economic reasons as well. As part of the Japanese order, Chiang believed Japan would monopolize trade and forcibly serve as the middleman between China and the outside world, raising tariffs on non-Japanese imports and effectively ending the international Open Door policy.

This was hardly a groundless concern, nor was it only a concern of the Chungking KMT. American diplomats, in a 10-6-1938 memorandum to the Japanese foreign affairs ministry, noted Japanese government officials had reneged on their promise to maintain the Open Door in Manchuria following the establishment of Manchukuo, and had indeed gone so far as to establish special companies with privileged positions while “restricting rigidly the movement of goods and funds between Manchuria and countries other than Japan.”\footnote{Hsu Shuhsi, \textit{Whither Japan}, (Shanghai—HK—Singapore: Kelly & Walsh, 1941), 101.} Internally, Japan would monopolize domestic industries and staff them with Japanese employees, employing Japanese and setting favorable rates so as to bring more wealth back to the home
islands. In Chiang’s eyes, this arrangement would not just be bad for Chinese trade, but would serve to limit the economic freedom and indeed weigh upon the daily lives of Chinese citizens. Therefore, continued resistance was imperative to preserve the freedom of the Chinese nation and its citizens. That capitalist nations like the United States took issue with Japanese trade practices was itself a reason for hope, in that the case for helping the Chinese resistance was itself materially beneficial to outsiders.

The second aspect of opposition to Wang was the destruction of Wang’s revolutionary reputation and the slander of his character. Wang Jingwei, while a long-time rival of Chiang Kai-shek, had also been a long-time partner as well. Wang and Chiang had formed coalition governments in the past, with the most recent coalition government formed in 1932 and lasting until Wang’s defection in 1938. A response to heavy pressure from the KMT Left and civilian-rule advocates against Chiang’s personalistic, militarist government, Wang and his followers were successful in restoring some degree of power to the civilian wing of the party. Indeed, Wang was Chiang’s vice-president at the time of his defection. However, while Wang and his anti-militarist faction was successful in extracting some concessions from Chiang, Chiang was still the most powerful figure in the party. In any case, the fact that Chiang and Wang had cooperated extensively in the past meant that Chiang couldn’t simply dismiss Wang outright. If Wang had always been an anti-nationalist, then this

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89 Chiang, 《關於汪精衛叛國》 [Regarding Wang Jingwei’s Betrayal of the Nation], 6.
would have dangerous implications for Chiang’s own legitimacy as a capable nationalist leader—how could he not have noticed? Therefore, it was imperative to separate Wang the traitor from Wang the nationalist.

While Chiang and the KMT editors themselves offer little to explain Wang’s apparent change of heart, this is how they presented his collaboration to the nation. They enlisted the help of prominent figures from all over the political spectrum in opposing Wang and his Peace Movement in an attempt to present the Chungking KMT/CCP Second United Front as a true national government. In this regard, they were largely successful. For example, the second section of “Regarding Wang Jingwei’s Betrayal of the Nation” is a collection of statements from famous political figures regarding Wang’s departure and public declaration of support for the peace movement. This section includes statements from “the hewer of Communist heads” Bai Chongxi, the Guangxi warlord Li Zongren (1891-1969), preeminent Communist Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), and public intellectual He Xiangning (1878-1972). He, a noted feminist and leftist political figure of the Republican period and wife of the late KMT leader Liao Zhongkai, wrote: “the Wang Jingwei that sent this telegram [艷電 yandian, referred to hereafter as the Hanoi Telegram] is not the same revolutionary Wang Jingwei that followed in Sun Yat-sen’s footsteps. Rather, this Wang Jingwei is one who openly supports the extermination of our nation at the hands of the Japanese.”91 Interestingly, He mentions Sun Yat-sen directly in her discussion of

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91 Chiang, 《關於汪精衛叛國》 [Regarding Wang Jingwei’s Betrayal of the Nation], 23.
[。。。發表艷電之後的汪精衛，不是跟隨總理奔走革命時的汪精衛，而是公開執行日本滅亡我全民族政策的汪精衛。]
Wang’s good revolutionary past; that this is contrasted with his present “treasonous” persona illustrates that leftists like He still held Sun in high regard. When we think back to Wang Fanxi and his memoir, we may recall that Sun was the object of much mockery among the Peking communist circles, but they too found it politically necessary to pay homage to Sun. Sun Yat-sen and his Three People’s Principles were plainly still politically relevant during the dark days of the Second Sino-Japanese War, and so damaging Wang’s connections to Sun was important for discrediting him.

He’s take, while enlightening, is less detailed than that of Zhou Enlai, who had worked closely with Wang during the days of the First United Front and the Wuhan KMT. To Zhou, Wang’s change of heart could be easily explained: Wang Jingwei was nothing more than an opportunist and a scoundrel. “In 1927, in Hankou during the days of KMT/CCP cooperation,” Zhou states, “afterwards during the anti-Chiang activities of Yan Xishan and Feng Yuxiang, even during the time of Hu Hanmin’s Canton betrayal: whenever the going got tough, Wang Jingwei would abandon his comrades.”92 To Zhou, Wang’s departure from the Chungking government to pursue peace negotiations in Hanoi with Japanese representatives was no different than his turn on the Communists in Wuhan in 1927. In Zhou’s eyes, Wang had decided it had simply become too politically inconvenient to continue as a

92 Ibid., 30.

[。。。一九二七年，汪在漢口與共產黨合作，後又參加関錫山馮玉祥之反蔣活動，並參加胡漢民在廣州之叛變，但每一次遇苦難，汪即背棄其同事者。]
member of the Chungking United Front.

While He and Zhou both discuss Wang’s possible motivations, the KMT generals Bai Chongxi and Li Zongren spend little time or effort in such a pursuit. To them, Wang had betrayed the party and the nation, and they issued instructions to their KMT subordinates notifying them of such: “To every party bureau, civil society group, revolutionary comrade, countryman: Wang Jingwei has betrayed the party-state. He has turned to aid the enemy, and so he has been forever expelled from the party by the central leadership committee.”\(^93\) Note Li and Bai’s term “party-state” 党國 dangguo; that the party (the Kuomintang) and the state are so closely intertwined is important in that it illustrates Chiang and the KMT Right’s conception of the Republic. The Republic of China, to the rightists, was the state, the KMT its party and government, the Chinese people its nation, and Chiang Kai-shek its leader. Any action against Chiang was therefore an action taken against the Chinese nation itself. While the KMT Right was once again forced into an alliance with the Communists, the words of Li and Bai are useful in determining the attitude of the party faithful towards this arrangement and the “proper” order of things.

Notably, historian Gerald E. Bunker alleges that neither Chiang nor his allies in the higher levels of government were as resolutely opposed to peace terms as this work makes it seem. Bunker, in fact, argues that Wang was put in charge of feeling out peace terms by Chiang and the Central Committee, and that the Chungking KMT

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 20.

[海内外各黨部，各民衆團體，各革命同志同胞均鑑：此次汪兆銘背叛黨國，為敵張目，經由中央常會予以永遠開除汪黨籍處分。。。]
was not so blind as to think the war was going well.\textsuperscript{94} He cites preparatory steps, like Chiang resigning as head of the Legislative Yuan in 1938, Wang meeting with the Italian diplomat Galeazzo Ciano to pressure Japan into offering favorable peace conditions, and correspondence between diplomats Wang Zhonghui and Hirota Koki (1878-1948) in illustrating that peace was a genuine interest of both the KMT Right and Left in the early stages of the Second Sino-Japanese War. So what changed? According to Bunker, the pivotal turn was Konoe Fumimaro’s (1891-1945) \textit{aite wo sezu} telegram, issued on 1-16-1938.\textsuperscript{95} Once Konoe formally stated the Japanese government’s policy unwillingness to work with Chiang Kai-shek, and later its desire for the total destruction of the KMT regime in Konoe’s 12-22-1938 telegram, there was no possibility for the KMT Right to make peace with Japan, as Chiang and the rightists were the face of the regime. Wang, sensing an opportunity, continued the peace talks with the plan of establishing the KMT Left as the proper government in Nanjing. While this narrative is well-reasoned, Bunker himself admits to the murkiness of KMT internal politics at this time, and so we will examine Wang’s public statements and writings to see how he justified this decision.

\textbf{Section III: Wang’s Justifications}

While the KMT Publishing House, Chiang Kai-shek, and Gerald Bunker to an extent put forward a narrative of a dastardly Wang Jingwei betraying his former revolutionary ideals and comrades in favor of personal gain, Wang’s argument in

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 46.
favor of collaboration, or cooperation (合作 hezuo means either but lacks the implicit negative connotation of the English “collaboration”), is consistent with his writings on the path forward for China throughout the 1920s and 1930s.\(^{96}\) To be succinct, Wang’s ideology, to the extent that it existed independent of Sun’s thought, emphasized the importance of national reconstruction over anything else. This focus on national reconstruction is one of the most prominent differences between Wang’s political thought and that of Chiang Kai-shek, who regarded the maintenance of national sovereignty and territorial integrity more pressing than development and reconstruction.

National reconstruction was hardly a unique idea of Wang’s, being a focal point of Sun Yat-sen’s codified Three People’s Principles and a frequent discussion topic for Chiang Kai-shek as well. All three men emphasized the importance of national reconstruction, but Chiang and Wang had different understandings of Sunism. One key difference between the two interpretations is the extent of civilian participation in the government. While Chiang emphasized the necessity of tutelage, as exemplified by the New Life Movement, Wang emphasized political equality and the importance of civilian control of the government—this does not mean that Wang did not find tutelage necessary, however. In a memorial address commemorating the first anniversary of the death of Sun Yat-sen, Wang delivered a speech addressing the


《頗聞有人對於中日合作之前途, 以有無誠意為慮, 須知誠意由於兩方努力而見, 且由於兩方不斷之努力而有所增益, 決非可以觀望而得之者。》
importance of political equality, stating:

Although our Prime Minister is dead, his spirit is not; it lives on in his will. The Prime Minister wants the people to be free and equal. All those who oppose the freedom and equality of the people are the enemies of the Chinese people and the enemies of the Nationalist Party. These sorts of people are imperialist warlords. To overthrow the warlords, we must inspire the uprising of the people, the workers, the peasants and equally share in the racial-nationalist struggle.\(^{97}\)

His emphasis on the equality of the people and the importance of mobilizing the entire population illustrates the KMT Left’s general political stance towards the people. This stance differs from that of the KMT Right, which placed more emphasis on the role of the military officer class in serving as the vanguard and engine of the revolution.\(^ {98}\)

Of course, it would be incorrect to say that Chiang did not also value equality. He writes at length about how the seed of China’s past glory was the equality of its “stocks”, and how the seed of China’s current struggles was the Manchu drawing of artificial divisions between the five “stocks” of the Chinese nation: Han, Manchu,


Mongolian, Muslim (Hui), and Tibetan. Moreover, Chiang is highly critical of capitalist inequality, believing that the capitalist system is a direct and integral pillar of Western imperialism. That “…[Western] capitalists, in pursuit of profit and gain, have not hesitated to harness human beings to the techniques of production, while the imperialists, desiring to acquire and develop colonial possessions, have enslaved human beings…” is an obvious fact to Chiang, which is one way that he justified extorting the Shanghai business class to fund KMT operations throughout the nation. Here we may recall Trotsky’s argument against the revolutionary potential of peripheral bourgeoisie, and see that Chiang ensured the cooperation of this cosmopolitan class through coercion. He sought to simply use them as cash reserves, rather than try to actually coopt them, and in this regard he was largely successful. In any case, we can see here that both Wang and Chiang are at least concerned with equality in their political writings, but how does this translate into their nationalist politics, and how did this translate to their wildly different wartime paths? As this paper primarily concerns Wang, we will spend most of our attention on him and his policies.

Subsection A: Reconstruction and Peace

While Wang and Chiang had some significant differences in their broader interpretations of the Three People’s Principles, perhaps more important was Wang’s civilian-focused economic development plan. This plan is best understood through his

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99 Chiang, China’s Destiny, 21.
100 Ibid., 229.
work *On China’s Problems and Their Solutions*, published in 1934 as part of T’ang Leang-li’s “China To-day” English-language book series. This was after the Wang-Chiang coalition reformed in response to pressure from the civilian party members for increased power, so Wang is listed as the President of the Legislative Yuan in the foreword. Moreover, the writings and actions of Chen Gongbo, member of the civilian party-wing and the Second President of the Nanjing regime—the first being Wang—provides valuable insight into what this actually looked like.\textsuperscript{102} Wang’s focus on anti-militarism and economic reform was a large part of his public identity; indeed, T’ang, in his laudatory forward to *China’s Problems* framed Wang’s focus on the economic and the institutional as the foundation for a healthy Chinese state and republic: “Champion of the people and the bitterest enemy of predatory militarism…Mr. Wang realized that no democracy can be real which is not founded on an ordered, financially sound, Government…”\textsuperscript{103} This focus on the economic underpins the entirety of Wang’s political philosophy. Growth must reach all sectors of society for the Principle of the People’s Welfare to be realized. This much is a direct connection between economic welfare and the revival of the Chinese nation.

This emphasis on the economic and institutional is clearly seen in his focus on national reconstruction. Therefore, all other policies were secondary to the modernization and strengthening of China’s economic, political, and military institutions. Regarding China’s political path and attitude towards other nations, Wang writes that “China’s most pressing task is national reconstruction, and as this

\textsuperscript{102} Zanasi, “Chen Gongbo and the Construction of a Modern Nation in 1930s China”, *Pan-Asian in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, regionalism, and borders*, 130.  
\textsuperscript{103} Wang, *China’s Problems and Their Solution*, XX.
can be fully accomplished only in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility, her desire for peace is obviously stronger than that of any other country.”

We may recall that the KMT had been regarded by the foreign press as a Red party, with Chiang described as the Red General and KMT Right/Left power struggles being described as Communist internal strife. Sustained attention from international papers like the New York Times led to a greater awareness and understanding of the Kuomintang among foreign observers, with journalists like Walter Duranty discussing the factional politics of the KMT Left and Right as far back as 1927.

While Chiang was largely cleared of these suspicions after the Shanghai purges, Wang, if he was known at all, was often remembered as one of the “Hankow Reds” who were under Mikhail Borodin’s thumb. Doing away with this suspicion and establishing Wang, the KMT, and the Republic of China as a peaceful and democratic partner in East Asia was plainly a goal of this work, which had been written for a foreign audience in English and in which Wang alluded to the usefulness of the work itself for those unfamiliar with Chinese politics and history. We only need to consider Wang’s explicit defense of KMT tutelage, or a period of preparatory party dictatorship as a prelude to democracy, as a necessary albeit regrettable temporary policy and his direct rebuttal of fascist party-states and Communist class

104 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
dictatorships to see this.\textsuperscript{108} Furthermore, Wang went on record in an interview with the New York Times to disassociate the KMT and the CCP: “We are not Communist…I want to assure the American public that the Kuomintang and the Communist Party have come to a parting of the ways.”\textsuperscript{109} This plainly illustrates how important Wang found it to separate himself and the KMT from the Communists, and so is telling in how he deals with narrative control. Along this line, T’ang frames the book as a useful guide to Chinese politics and current affairs, with Wang covering a wide variety of questions, such as: can militarism be defeated? How should the Communists be dealt with? What kind of government does China need?

In arguing his case for a localized democratic party-state consistent with leftist Sunism, Wang provides grounded arguments in explaining China’s turmoil, and a gradual solution. However, Wang’s take on the political situation of his nation is perhaps most powerfully communicated through a colorful metaphor that builds upon a common trope:

China is sick—and suffering from a series of complications, which may be described as general debility, a weak heart, and a tumorous growth. Either one of these afflictions and infirmities may prove fatal unless prompt measures are taken, and the problem confronting us today is to decide what should be done first. General debility is a term describing the unsettled and underdeveloped condition of a vast country rich in natural resources and with ample man-

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{108} Wang, \textit{China’s Problems and Their Solution}, pp. 51-52. \\
power to make good use of them. The weak heart refers to the political and financial strength of the National Government, while the tumorous growth stands for foreign invasion and occupation of Chinese territory.

These being the pathological conditions of the patient, it is obvious that the services of a surgeon to perform a major operation for the removal of the tumor are not yet needed, for the patient is not strong enough to stand the shock to the system.\(^\text{110}\)

The Communists, the Japanese, the Western Powers, the domestic warlords: while they seize Chinese land, do violence to the nation, and profit off its subjugation, the Chinese state is not yet strong enough to deal with them. While hardly less pressing than debility and illness, these tumors simply can’t be treated yet. That is not to say they will go untreated, but rather that the patient’s other maladies must be dealt with first. In this way, Wang resists the normalization of territorial losses while arguing to put the restoration of national borders on the backburner. It doesn’t require a great deal of imagination to see how this way of thinking would later lend itself to collaboration.

Indeed, this quote is reproduced in its entirety because it is Wang’s entire political thought distilled into a single metaphor. While the seizure of Manchuria and Jehol were fresh in the minds of the Chinese public, Kuomintang officials, and foreign observers, this was only the most recent foreign aggression committed against a nation suffering myriad problems. Even were it feasible to retake Chengde and

march on Changchun in 1934, Wang argues that any territorial gains would be immediately undermined by China’s pre-existing internal problems.

This argument will prove key in his collaboration, but it was also his argument against Chiang’s extensive anti-Communist mobilization efforts. Much as foreign powers carving at China’s borders was a symptom of state weakness, Communists staging insurrections and seizing parts of the countryside was not the problem itself. At one point in this work, Wang begins to discuss the problem that the Chinese Communist Party posed for the KMT. If Wang was to be credible in any way, he had to explain his turning on the Communist Party in 1927 and his responsibility in the Wuhan Purge. The necessity of this is shown by Zhou Enlai’s later criticism of his character. It helps that foreign readers of the time were less aware of Wang’s role in Wuhan than his countrymen, many of whom would continue to criticize Wang as either a Communist-sympathizer, as the KMT Right charged, or a secret fascist, as the Communists charged, despite his public opposition to militarism and Communism. Therefore, Wang says of his former allies that they are not the Communists that his foreign readership may be familiar with; rather, these Chinese “communists” were no more than bandits misapplying a warped version of a political philosophy poorly suited to China’s actual circumstances. To Wang, that the Soviet advisor Joffe himself formally stated that conditions in China were not conducive to socialism and that the Communist-bloc would support the KMT was incontrovertible proof that the Communists were wrong and acting against the nation’s interests.

\[111\] Ibid., 37.
However, Wang does not content himself with slandering the CCP; to his credit, he seeks to explain why the Communist Party, an organization that should have little pull in the semi-feudal Chinese countryside according to Marx and Joffe, had managed to establish a Soviet republic in the rural province of Jiangxi and to defend it for years against Chiang’s repeated encirclement campaigns. Wang attributes the success of Communist ideology in the countryside to the country’s mismanagement under the Qing and the present turmoil:

The explanation lies in the fact that for many years past—long before the Revolution—the farmers have been victimized by local officials and feudatory militarists, and compelled to pay illegal and exorbitant taxes and levies for the upkeep of what may be called personal armies. Moreover, the system of land-distribution is such that about three-quarters of the agricultural population have had cause for resentment and dissatisfaction at conditions which are a survival of the old monarchical days, and which have become worse as the result of the wars which have been fought between rival military leaders and the depredations of bandits.112

To Wang, the political is born of the economic. If the economic conditions in the countryside were more equitable, if the warlords were not impressing peasants into their starving armies, if the tax burden was less heavy, then the Communists and their extensive propaganda efforts would not find such a receptive audience. Therefore, the solution to the Communist problem for Wang is reform and reconstruction. By

112 Ibid., 39.
implementing the Three People’s Principles, which called for such concrete actions as the redistribution of land, the lessening of tax burdens on the poor, the raising of taxes on the rich, the education of the people, the political equality of the people, and the modernization of industry, Wang argues that the Chinese nation could not fail to become healthy and strong. Once the state and its institutions were healthy and strong, China would then be able to solve its other problems, like Communist insurrections or foreign aggression. However, forcing underpaid and malnourished troops to chase the Communists around the hinterlands while delaying reforms would only exacerbate the state’s problems. He raises the example of the Jiangxi peasantry to prove his point. As the Jiangxi peasantry was overtaxed, underserved, and victimized by corrupt officials and ruthless warlords, why would they not be susceptible to Communist propaganda? Until the root of the issue was solved, the Jiangxi situation would repeat itself throughout China, and indeed was repeating itself in Shaanxi.

To give a taste of Wang’s economic plans, which were crucial to his conception of national reconstruction, we will touch upon two policy outlines, one from Wang himself and one implemented by his political ally Chen Gongbo. Wang, while addressing land reform, builds an argument against radical land redistribution, which was one source of the CCP’s popularity in places like Jiangxi. According to Wang, the violent seizure of land was misguided in that it mistakenly equated small landlords and rich peasants with the grand landlords of ancient Regime France and

113 Ibid., 40.
tsarist Russia.\textsuperscript{114} Moreover, the violent seizure of lands would establish a norm of not respecting property rights, which Wang found undesirable, particularly considering that the KMT growth plan rested heavily on the cultivation of a domestic business class, integrated within the national economy. Therefore, Wang’s solution to the problem of unequal land distribution was one of policy: first, the government would establish a legal maximum with regards to acreage, and if an individual’s holdings exceeded the maximum, their surplus land (all acreage above the maximum) would be taxed heavily; second, all landowners were to be legally obligated to provide willing workers with the opportunity to work their land; third, peasant cooperatives would be privileged in all future land sales.\textsuperscript{115} In this way, Wang sought to realize the Principle of the People’s Welfare, which regarded unequal land ownership as the source of great economic and political problems for the aspiring democrat Sun.

Significantly, Wang’s solutions, while they sought the people’s welfare, were less concerned with individual freedoms than economic efficacy. Here we turn to his comrade Chen Gongbo, a fellow KMT leftist and opponent of Chiang-style militarism, who as the Minister of Industry established the Cotton Control Commission in 1934. Historian Margherita Zanasi describes the Cotton Control Commission as a fascistically organized entity under the direction of the KMT that sought to mobilize the entire Chinese cotton industry, from the factory owners to the mill workers to the cotton pickers themselves, so that China would develop a strong

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., pp. 173-174.
independent cotton industry. To this effect, the KMT would also enact tariffs on foreign cotton and textile wares. This establishment of a strong domestic cotton and textiles industry was a step towards establishing a zone of economic autarky, which would allow China to avoid colonization and strengthen the nation. Without the development of modern industry, a key aspect of national reconstruction, Wang and Chen believed China to be a sitting duck for further imperial aggression, whether at the hands of Japan, Britain, the United States, or the Soviet Union.

As Zanasi describes Wang and Chen’s goal of autarky to be a clear step towards the establishment of a Chinese fascism, she emphasizes their focus on class solidarity and government-guided corporatism, quoting Wang to explore his conception of the relationship between the people and the KMT:

Class solidarity, implied in the idea of economic cooperation, (hezuo) and socialist-style mass mobilization were bound together to form a system of joint party and mass control over the government, which added a revolutionary and fascist edge to the plan:

[Wang Jingwei:] “In order to prevent reconstruction from transforming itself into a tool of imperialism or bureaucratic capitalism we must (1) train the masses to rise and really participate in the government, and (2) unify the party so that it can really lead the masses and check on the government.”

To Wang, the centralized and “fascistic” CCC was not just economically necessary to

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116 Zanasi, “Chen Gongbo and the Construction of a Modern Nation in 1930s China”, *Pan-Asian in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, regionalism, and borders*, 133.
117 Ibid., 130.
strengthen China. It was an explicit part of political development and eventual
democratization. What is training the masses to rise and participate in the government
if not explicit tutelage? Note here that the party is itself expected to learn from this
exercise, another example of Sun’s sometimes indirect, non-liberal democracy.
Moreover, while this is a centralized government body organizing an entire industry,
there is no element of cultural militarization, and it fundamentally emphasized the
importance of establishing the norm of citizen participation in the government. While
autarky often carries connotations of fascism, here Wang argues for it as part of
national reconstruction and democratization.

Indeed, national reconstruction was part of Sun Yat-sen’s plan for the
introduction of democracy into China. However, neither Sun nor Wang believed this
could be introduced immediately. Wang outlines two periods of the party rule, with
the second following the successful completion of the first. This first stage of the plan
consisted of national reconstruction, the military unification of China, and civic
education. The second stage of the plan was the full introduction of democracy and
the realization of the Republic. While it may seem that the KMT insistence on
tutelage (stage one) is little more than an excuse for party-dictatorship, Wang cites the
disorder of the 1910s as evidence that the Chinese state was not yet strong enough for
the immediate implementation of Western-style participatory democracy.118 President
Yuan Shikai dissolved the KMT-led Parliament, crowned himself Emperor,
abdicated, and died within the span of the year. This destabilized the political
situation even further, and warlords quickly took advantage of the chaos to establish

118 Wang, China’s Problems and Their Solution, 71.
their own separate fiefdoms. For Wang, this chaos was obvious proof that the immediate introduction of democracy was premature and was not to be repeated. To further justify this claim as consistent with the teachings of the late Sun Yat-sen, the power behind the KMT and the most recognizable face of it for a Western audience, Wang cites Sun’s defense of tutelage at the 1-20-1924 National Congress of the Kuomintang:

The people are ignorant; society is backward; political ideas are but half-understood and ill-digested. To talk of the introduction of a democratic regime on the British or American plan is therefore premature. The Republic is not yet consolidated and the present mission of the Revolutionary Party is not so much the governance of the country as its reconstruction on a revolutionary basis—the creation of a State....When the State is well-established, we may proceed to govern it.\(^{119}\)

It is perhaps in the concept of tutelage that Soviet support in planning and ideological structure during the KMT’s early years is most apparent. Nevertheless, tutelage was accepted as necessary by both the left and right wings of the party.

Section IV: Avoiding Further Destruction

Now that we have discussed Wang Jingwei’s political ideas and his conception of national reconstruction, one that depended upon immediate, guided economic development, political development, and peace, we will discuss why Wang believed that defecting from the Chungking KMT in 1938 and collaborating—or

\(^{119}\) Ibid., 86.
cooperating—with the Japanese in 1940 were the right decisions. There are two main points. The first point to be addressed is the wartime situation of 1938, at the time of his defection from Chungking and his speech on sacrifice. This forms the negative aspect of the argument: the war was a disaster and peace was desirable because it would end the war. The second is Wang’s defense of this cooperation as justified according to Sunist nationalism. This is the positive aspect of the argument: even if collaboration was largely a matter of pragmatism, it was ideologically desirable as well.

The early war years were disastrous for China. While this is not the focus of this paper, we must note the conditions on the ground in China at this time. Interestingly, neither party had formally declared war until December 9, 1941, when the Chungking government declared war on the Empire of Japan.\(^{120}\) Of course, that does not mean that relations were breezy or even peaceful before this; indeed, the story of Sino-Japanese relations between the establishment of the Republic in 1911 and 1941 is one of brazen Japanese aggression and imperialism. From Shandong to Mukden, Mukden to Chengde, Japan had seized (or established special privileges and controls within, in the case of Shandong) no less than 600,000 square miles of land by 1934, and would only increase its holdings through military activities in North China. A 1932 mission to Shanghai was successful in forcing the Chinese demilitarization of the Shanghai area, including areas as far as Suzhou in the DMZ, and the temporary

relocation of the capital from the vulnerable city of Nanjing to Luoyang.\textsuperscript{121}

Following incidents in the North at the Marco Polo Bridge, Japanese forces invaded North China and Shanghai simultaneously. Beijing was encircled and captured without resistance on July 27, 1937; Kalgan, along the main Sino-Soviet trade route, was captured around the same time. In the South, Chiang mustered a strong resistance force in Shanghai, and so the battle for the economic hub of China raged for months.\textsuperscript{122} Ultimately, the city was lost due largely to a Japanese flanking maneuver through Hangzhou Bay; landing on the north shore of the bay in rural Jiaxing, the Japanese forced the retreat of the Chinese forces to defensive lines protecting Nanjing in November of 1937.\textsuperscript{123} The northern cities of Tianjin and Taiyuan fell as the Japanese North China Area armies proceeded south while the Japanese Central China Area armies pushed inland to Nanjing, capturing the Republic’s poorly-defended capital with infamous results. From here the Japanese armies pushed further inland while southern naval forces bombarded and seized critical ports.

For a time, the KMT-CCP joint forces were able to staunch the bleeding, with the government seated in the inland industrial center of the Wuhan cities. It was here that Chiang issued a statement to the world and to his countrymen outlining his view


\textsuperscript{122} Quigley, \textit{Far Eastern War: 1937-1941}, 72.

\textsuperscript{123} “CHINESE DEFENSES SHIFT AT SHANGHAI TO HALT NEW PUSH”, \textit{New York Times}, 11-08-1937.
of the war, and what needed to be done. Urging his countrymen to continue the fight, Chiang writes “For the sake of our national existence, of the status of our race, of international justice and of world peace, China finds no ground for submission. All those who have blood and breath in them must feel that they wish to be broken as jade rather than remain whole as tile.” However, despite Chiang’s moving words and the large armies of China, the Japanese armies were much better equipped. Outfitted with modern technology, extensive armor, and air superiority, the Imperial Japanese Army continued its advance inland. The Wuhan government was soon under direct threat from the advancing Japanese. Under the advice of the advisor He Chengpu and commander Cheng Qian (1882-1968), Chiang ordered the destruction of the Huayuankou dikes to impede a coming Japanese advance on Zhengzhou approaching from the fallen cities of Luoyang and Kaifeng.

![Map of China showing the Huayuankou area](image)

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This was an act of desperation. Chiang believed, while the flooding would be disastrous, allowing the capture of the railway junction in Zhengzhou would critically hamper the war effort and put the provisional capital of Wuhan at risk. Moreover, Japanese armies approaching Wuhan from Xuzhou were estimated to be only days from the capital. While KMT officials estimated the flood to have killed some 800,000 civilians, it was successful in delaying the marches on Zhengzhou and Wuhan.\footnote{Micah S. Muscolino, \textit{The Ecology of War in China: Henan Province, the Yellow River, and Beyond, 1938–1950}, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), 15.} It was not, however, successful in preventing their capture. Wuhan was lost on October 21, 1938, with the KMT government retreating yet further west, this time holing up in the mountain city of Chungking.\footnote{Ibid., 31.} Canton was soon after captured by the Imperial Japanese Navy, which left the KMT without its last major port; given the KMT’s dependence on imported materiel and industrial equipment, this did not bode well for the defense effort.

The tide of the war is crucial context for understanding the motivations of Wang Jingwei and the many high-ranking KMT party members who left Chungking in 1938 shortly after the fall of Wuhan and Canton—many of whom followed him to Nanjing in 1940. The Chinese defense effort was largely disastrous, with vast swaths of Chinese territory being seized by Japanese forces. Moreover, civilians were dying en masse, whether at the hands of rapacious Japanese troops, the many bandits that plagued the roads during this time of disorder, famine, or at the hands of their own
government—like those who drowned in the 1938 Yellow River flood. That the Japanese Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, in his infamous 12-22-1938 telegram, framed the war as punitive action against the KMT, not against the Chinese people, gave little reason for hope barring outright defeat or regime change:

The Japanese Government is resolved…to carry on the military operations for the complete extermination of the anti-Japanese Kuomintang Government, and at the same time to proceed with the work of establishing a new order in East Asia together with those far-sighted Chinese who share in our ideals and aspirations.\footnote{Ibid., 283.}

That the government of the military strongman Chiang Kai-shek had fled some 800 miles inland was a matter of fact, and it did not inspire confidence among Chinese or international observers. A representative piece of wartime propaganda, purportedly of Japanese origin, illustrates a very bald Chiang flying away from the battlefront in a plane full of money while his troops are bombed to nothing. “Xuzhou is lost!” he shouts. “Save us!” the soldiers shout. This piece plays off the strong anti-Chiang sentiments and significant pessimism about the Chinese defense during this period of the war.
Among Chinese politicians, perhaps no one would take up the flag of anti-Chiang action so fervently as Wang Jingwei. Note Konoe’s mention of “far-sighted Chinese”; this olive branch is critical in understanding how Wang viewed his collaboration. In Wang’s eyes, the war would continue to grind on until Chiang’s government was dismantled; Chiang, a powerful man with fiercely loyal supporters and at least another 1,500 miles of breathing room to the northwest of the mountain fortress the KMT had made of Chungking, indicated neither in speech nor in action a willingness to make peace. Moreover, he was willing to resort to drastic measures to continue the war, like drowning hundreds of thousands of his own countrymen and destroying vast swaths of economically productive land and crucial infrastructure.

130 Unknown artist, unknown title, sourced from Meng Yulou, 《部分侵华日军宣传单——日本可耻的宣传部队》 [Some Japanese Invasion Propaganda—Japan’s Shameful Propaganda Team], http://bbs.tiexue.net/post_4164049_1.html, 3-29-2010.
Therefore, Wang believed the war would last for months or years. That the countryside was in turmoil was no secret; moreover, Chinese requests for aid from the international powers, whether the West, the Soviet bloc, or the fascists, had received little more than lip-service, with the League of Nations condemning Japan’s seizure of Manchuria but not acting. A nation is its citizens; the millions dying in a poorly managed defense effort did not escape Wang’s attention, nor did the countless damage done to a nation whose infrastructure and institutions were already substandard.

Following this logic, and believing himself to be undertaking a great burden by doing so, Wang Jingwei defected from the Chungking KMT and went forward to negotiate peace with Japanese representatives in Hanoi in late 1938. While Bunker indicates that the Chungking government had already sanctioned initiating peace negotiations and that Wang had made no secret about his desire for peace, Chiang and the KMT pilloried Wang as a hanjian, the lowest of the low. What is the reason for this dissonance? It appears that, as Konoe had marked the Chungking KMT for utter annihilation on 12-22-1938, Wang’s 12-29-1938 telegram advocating for peace came after the possibility for a decent peace deal—that is, one that Chiang and his supporters would find palatable—had been destroyed. Obviously, Chiang and the Chungking KMT viewed themselves as the national government, and would not accept any peace deal that would dismantle their government. Therefore, Wang’s acquiescence to these terms was a direct attack on Chiang and the remaining members of the United Front—the Japanese imperial policy towards Communists was also destruction. Chiang had made Wang his vice-president as an effort to present a
truly united front, and so Wang’s abandonment of the Chungking government for negotiations in Hanoi was treason to Chiang.\textsuperscript{131} Moreover, Hu Shih stated that the reason Chiang had given up on peace efforts is that there was no chance of an acceptable peace; that is, one that maintained Chinese territorial sovereignty, KMT political power, and Chinese economic sovereignty.\textsuperscript{132} Therefore, Chiang and his followers believed Wang to be a race-traitor (\textit{hanjian}), selling the nation for his own personal gain by opposing the United Front. As can be seen from the KMT’s “Regarding Wang Jingwei’s Betrayal of the Nation”, which drew quotes from KMT generals, Communist intellectuals, and overseas labor unions, this was not a rare sentiment among members of the United Front or Chinese people more generally, despite their political differences.

However, Wang had a different understanding of what he was doing in entering negotiations with Japanese representatives in Hanoi. To him, this was not a selfish action, but a patriotic one. Wang’s discussion of sacrifice outlines his thoughts on the war situation of late 1938, and is illuminating in understanding how he saw collaboration as patriotic cooperation:

\begin{quote}
Sacrifice is a cruel word, but we continue to sacrifice ourselves. What’s more, we continue to demand our countrymen sacrifice themselves all together! We know China is a weak nation, we the citizens of a weak nation. Because of this, our supposed resistance has no other meaning aside from sacrifice. In the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 92.
name of sacrifice, we plan to use every citizen, every clump of dirt, and turn it all to ash! Once the sacrifice is done, the fate we sought to avoid will be met.\textsuperscript{133}

The negative argument is plainly significant, but is not particularly complex. While Wang blamed Japan for wanton aggression, he believed that the war was already lost and continued resistance would only harm the country in the long run.\textsuperscript{134} He states that China had been in a state of perpetual retreat since 1931, and that further retreat—like Chiang’s retreat to Chungking—missed the point that Japan was able to take Chinese land because it was a modern state with modern institutions and a strong army, while China was not.\textsuperscript{135} Moreover, the Chinese defense strategy was looking worse by the week, with Chiang’s breaking of the Huayuankou Dikes and the National Army’s burning of Changsha—one of Republican China’s last remaining industrial hubs—being points of particular frustration for Wang.\textsuperscript{136} Not only was the war destructive, but the defense itself was setting China back greatly. Furthermore, continuing the war was only further delaying peace, which was necessary for reconstruction. Without reconstruction and modernization, Wang believed that China had no hope of maintaining its sovereignty in any form, and so he argued for peace so

\textsuperscript{133} Chiang, \textit{關於汪精衛叛國} [Regarding Wang Jingwei’s Betrayal of the Nation], 103.

[犧牲這兩個字是殘酷的，我們自己犧牲，我們並且要全國同胞一齊犧牲！因為我們是弱國，我們是弱國之民，我們所謂的抵抗，無他內容，其內容只是犧牲，我們要使每一個人，每一塊土地，都成爲灰燼！犧牲完了，我們的抵抗目的也達到了。]

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 102.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 102.

that reconstruction may begin. While the peace was lopsided and the peace deal would turn out to be painful, Wang argued, and continued to argue, that this was a necessary pain if China was to continue the process of national reconstruction.

Indeed, while Wang’s government was only the latest of several collaborator regimes, including the East Hopei Government, the Great Way Government, and the Reformed Government, it was notable for its relative strength and sovereignty within the Japanese framework. Harold S. Quigley, a political scientist at the University of Minnesota in 1942, observed that the members of the Wang regime, established in 1940, did not view the government as a puppet government. It also did not look or function quite like one. The ROC flag and trappings were used, Chinese politicians exerted real power in administration, portraits of Sun were bowed to before speeches, the five-branch government was implemented, and the Three People’s Principles served as the guiding ideology of the state. However, on the ground, Quigley stated that, “The Chinese officials are less closely supervised by their Japanese advisers than those at Peking, but the larger freedom is of no use to them since the military reorganization [referring to the military control structure in the occupied areas] of Japan parallels their paper regime.”

Bunker quotes Chiang Kai-shek’s reaction to Konoe’s 12-22-1938 statement to illustrate the terms of peace as “terms of capitulation”: “The aim of the Japanese is to control China militarily under the pretext of anti-Communism, to eliminate Chinese culture under the cloak of protection of Oriental culture and to expel European and American influences from the Far East.

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under the pretext of breaking down economic walls.” These harsh allegations were a direct response to Konoe’s telegram, and were not without basis. Plainly, Wang Jingwei was not presiding over a sovereign Republican government. However, while administration on the ground was subject to the dominating influence of the Japanese military, which often set up local committees of collaborators and attempted to enlist them in implementation of Japanese policy, the actual efficacy of the Reorganized Nationalist government here is less important to this paper than the ideas that were invoked to justify it.

Before we go on to discuss “Chiang’s Magnet War” and “Implementing the Three People’s Principles”, we ought to note again the cardinal sin with which historians like John Hunter Boyle and Communists like Wang Fanxi often charged Sun Yat-sen and Wang Jingwei. As Boyle writes in *Chinese Collaboration with Japan*, Sun and Wang are both guilty of ideological flexibility and inconsistency; indeed, he goes so far as to say that “…in trying to understand either Sun Yat-sen or his disciple Wang, one is in conceptually arid terrain where oases of consistency are seldom encountered.” According to this argument, seeking to understand the ideology guiding the KMT is fundamentally difficult and unrewarding because there is little actually guiding the party. This criticism is reminiscent of Sneeveliet’s argument for the “bloc within” approach. This is a fair allegation, particularly when Sunism is contrasted with more ideologically cohesive movements like the

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Communist movement or even Chen Jiongming’s failed federalist movement.

However, this does not mean there is nothing there; indeed, while the flexibility of
Sunist ideology is apparent to anyone, there are some concrete ideas within it.

Moreover, while it is plainly true that Wang and Sun varied greatly in their
application of their ideas, after the 1924 codification of the Three People’s Principles
in Canton, we have a more or less firm orthodoxy to refer back to in appraising
Wang’s (or, for that matter, Chiang’s) implementation of Sun’s ideology.

Furthermore, while I have spoken at length about Wang’s prioritization of
reconstruction over territorial integrity, this does not mean that Wang had always
been on record as reconstruction first. Notably, Wang said in a speech regarding the
1933 Tanggu Truce with Japan that the truce allowed China time:

…first, to unite the country politically and economically as to form a united
front against outside forces; second, to eliminate the Red bandits who have
disturbed the safety of the interior and checked the armed forces from moving
to the front…; and third, to strive diligently to reconstruct our material
resources so as to strengthen and enlarge our capacity for a war of
resistance.140

While this may seem to be an explicit endorsement of Chiang’s anti-Communist
policies, the details here indicate otherwise. Notice that the emphasis remains on
economic and political unity, not territorial integrity. Moreover, while we have not
discussed much about Wang’s post-Wuhan thought with regards to the internal threat

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140 Ibid., 31.
of the Communists, we ought to note that this truce was jointly decided upon by Chiang and Wang. Indeed, Chiang’s intense focus on Communist eradication is reflected in Wang’s truce justification. Notably, this appears at odds with Wang’s prior writings on the solution to the Communist problem, which maintained that reconstruction was the cure, but he didn’t seem to care to oppose Chiang on this point. Third, the focus on national reconstruction as the crux of national defense and eventual national integrity is readily apparent in his final point. Therefore, while Wang agreed with Chiang’s anti-Communist movement, his focus on reconstruction and political-economic reform remains apparent.

Having addressed this and finding that Wang’s focus on reconstruction is consistent, we now move on to a weighty question: if the Japanese peace terms were so bad, then why did Wang accept them? While Bunker implies that Wang had simply overplayed his hand in working towards negotiating the withdrawal of Japanese troops and couldn’t feasibly return to Chungking, Wang’s article “Chiang’s Magnet War”, published on 6-15-1940, sheds different light on the answer. In this article, Wang outlines three points in favor of entering the Japanese sphere: first, it is appropriate for Japan, Manchukuo, and China to have friendly relations; second, it is regrettable that the three countries are currently fighting each other; third, Prime Minister Konoe has offered China an out through cooperation.141 Aside from the third, these positive points are vague and none are terribly persuasive; however, this article is more notable for its negative argument. In this article Wang lambasts

Chiang, stating this war is a waste of Chinese lives and territory and that Chiang, by
hiding out in Chungking, is simply preserving his personal forces and power while
allowing the frontline armies and the countryside to suffer. Moreover, Wang
derides Chiang’s turtling strategy:

But I want to ask a question: can this strategy achieve victory? No, it cannot.
Well, why not? First, this strategy depends on waiting for international aid;
second, it depends on the collapse of the Japanese economy. As for
international aid, judging by the recent state of the European war, that doesn’t
seem very likely. Moreover, how is the Japanese economy going to collapse?
We always say “Sino-Japanese conflict only hurts both nations”, but this is
not quite right. While Japan cannot avoid being harmed by such a conflict,
China only has death to expect.

This is an extension of Wang’s negative argument; however, there is a positive aspect
to the argument that ought to be considered as well. Moreover, while we know the
end result, it was no foregone conclusion that Japan would attack the United States or
that British-Indian and American forces would open up the Burma Road.

Section V: Reconciling Pan-Asianism and Nationalism

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142 Ibid., 2277.

[但是我要問一句，這種戰法能得最後勝利嗎？不能的，那麼怎麼辦呢？一，期
待國際援助，二，期待日本經濟枯竭可與崩潰。國際援助，看見最近歐戰情
形，大概可以付之苦笑了。日本經濟之枯竭與崩潰又如何呢？常常說到：《中
日戰下去，只有兩敗俱傷》這話不完全對的，中國戰下去日本不免於傷，中國
則只有死而已。]

143 Ibid., 2276.
The positive argument for collaboration is most clearly laid out in the Hanoi Telegram of 12-29-1938 and Wang’s lecture “Implementing the Three People’s Principles and Pan-Asianism to Revive China and East Asia”. The first step of the positive argument is portraying the Japanese order as favorable to China, which itself involves reinterpreting blatant Japanese imperialism. To this effect, in the Hanoi Telegram, Wang praises Konoe’s 12-22-1938 telegram (see footnote 128) and states that this gives the KMT a route to ending the violence that ensued after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. Wang’s telegram creates a flattering depiction of Japan, but the most important part of this telegram is how Wang presents the case for peace. Citing Konoe’s telegram, Wang says that as the Japanese are not asking for land, but are instead asking for regional cooperation and “good neighborliness” (為善鄰友好 wei shanlin youhao) while respecting the sovereignty of the Chinese nation; therefore, the KMT should dissolve the Second United Front, tolerate the Japanese troops stationed in Meng Jiang while supporting the anti-Communist effort, and begin the modernization and reconstruction of the nation.\footnote{Wang Jingwei, 《艷電》 [Hanoi Telegram], Wang Jingwei Irrevocable Trust, 12-29-1938, http://wangjingwei.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/wjw-pws-2019-2021.pdf, 2021.} While his words regarding Japan are far kinder than those in his English language work \textit{On China’s Problems and Their Solutions}, in which he describes the Japanese government as a bunch of ruthless imperialists who will receive their comeuppance after China’s successful reconstruction or at the hands of their own unhappy citizens, the basic logic is the same in both.\footnote{Wang, \textit{China’s Problems and Their Solution}, 120.} The key difference, aside from target audience, is that in 1934, when...
China’s Problems was published, Japanese armies had not yet made significant
inroads into China proper. By December 29, 1938, Japanese forces had captured great
amounts of Chinese land and brought great destruction to the nation. While it seems
that this kind appraisal of Japan is a pragmatic move, it ultimately doesn’t change the
logic of his justification.

Wang expanded his argument for cooperation beyond pragmatism by tying the
implementation of the Three People’s Principles to Pan-Asianism, which was the
guiding ideology of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. According to
Japanese Pan-Asianist and political thinker Royama Masamichi (1895-1980), Pan-
Asianism is straightforward. The Asian nations, being similar culturally and
intertwined economically, ought to cooperate politically as to resist Western
imperialism and develop East Asia.146 While he referred specifically to East Asia,
representatives from South Asian countries like Subhas Chandra Bose in India were
included and were indeed active members of the Pan-Asian movement. This
understanding of Pan-Asianism is one of consensual political cooperation between a
league of equal member states; indeed, Royama’s conception of a Pan-Asian union
sounds something like the European Union. While there are many variations of Pan-
Asianism, we here will defer to Royama, who was among the most influential Pan-
Asianists of the 1930s. However, while his conception of Pan-Asianism sounds good,
Quigley raises the first article of the Sino-Japanese Cooperation Treaty, signed by the

146 J. Victor Koschmann, “Constructing destiny: Royama Masamichi and Asian
regionalism in wartime Japan”, Pan-Asian in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism,
regionalism, and borders, ed. Sven Saaler and J Victor Koschmann, (NY: Routledge,
2007), 189.
Wang government in 1940, as evidence of Pan-Asianism being little more than a pretext for Japanese domination of East Asia. According to Quigley, the first article of the treaty is representative of “the cynical double talk of indirect rule”:

The Governments of the two countries shall, in order to maintain permanently good neighborly and amicable relations between the two countries, mutually respect their sovereignty and territories and at the same time take mutually helpful and friendly measures, political economic and cultural. (Italics are the author’s)[Quigley’s note].

Provisions for “joint defense” against communistic movements, complementary economic development, special facilities for Japan in extraction of natural resources, a monopoly of ‘necessary assistance’ to China’s industrial and commercial progress, and other arrangements fully reflected Japan’s position.”

While Royama speaks of an equal and voluntary league, when we consider the treaty and the reality of Japanese aggression towards China, it seems as though Quigley’s harsh assessment of the Japanese Pan-Asian movement is not without basis. What was termed mutually beneficial was asymmetric at best.

One example of this asymmetry, beyond the trade manipulation in Manchukuo mentioned in Section II of this chapter, is the administration of Meng Jiang. Meng Jiang, a Mongol puppet state set up by the Japanese military and Mongol leader Prince Demchugdorj (1902-1966) that would later be absorbed by Wang’s

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Nanjing regime, was supposedly a liberated territory. Free from China, the Mongol majorities of Suiyuan and southern Charhar provinces were now free to rule themselves and to participate as an equal member in the new East Asian order. However, within the new order, Meng Jiang was a small entity with little power to influence Tokyo. Moreover, the extent of local rule in Meng Jiang was severely limited by the structure of its imposed government. The Joint Committee, the main government body, “was to have ‘a chief Japanese advisor and a number of Japanese counselors and advisers,’ and its decisions were to ‘receive the concurrence of the chief Japanese adviser and of the other advisers concerned’ before they would become valid”. In this way, while Prince Demchugdorub secured a Mongol political entity within the Japanese order, he failed to secure a Mongol state. This is one example of how the Japanese order fell short of Royama’s mutually beneficial, voluntary Pan-Asian union, and an illustration of how the member states of the Co-Prosperity Sphere were controlled by Tokyo.

However, that is not our chief concern here. More relevant to Wang’s justifications, Royama brings up the need for the Chinese to reject nationalism in favor of regionalism—a regionalism that only made sense in an East vs. West framework, according to Japanese political thinker Takata Yasuma (1883-1972). Royama, in defending Japanese expansion and explaining the war, blamed Chinese nationalism for misunderstanding Pan-Asianism:

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148 Hsu, Whither Japan, 68.
149 Koschmann, “Constructing Destiny: Royama Masamichi and Asian Regionalism in Wartime Japan”, Pan-Asian in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, regionalism, and borders, 192.
The unity of the East must be born of the transcendence of nationalism. Where is the motive force capable of accomplishing that transcendence? It is latent in the very expansion of Japanese nationalism toward the Asian continent…The principle intrinsic to Japan’s advance is not imperialism but rather regionalism for the purposes of defense and development. This principle of regionalism has become manifest only recently. It is entirely natural that the immature Chinese nationalism should misunderstand and distort this as imperialism.\(^{150}\)

However, while Royama derides Chinese nationalism as immature, it is worth remembering that Wang had been explicit about the importance of reestablishing the KMT in Nanjing as the undiluted Republic of China. That meant privileging Sun Yat-sen, an ardent nationalist, and relying upon local administration through the offices of a political party literally called the Nationalist Party. While some Japanese military administrators were determined to find willing collaborators as to avoid having to actually run a country as large as occupied China—their efforts in North China were time-consuming, to say nothing of their efforts in Manchukuo or their outright colonies in Korea and Taiwan—giving power to overtly nationalistic collaborators was a potential long-term problem.\(^{151}\) Having consolidated their position, the collaborator governments—already seen as opportunistic—would be ready to break at any time. This is consistent with Wang’s logic of reconstruction. Therefore, to win the favor of the Japanese military administration, Wang made an effort, like Liang

\(^{150}\) Ibid., 194.

Hongzhi with the Reformed Government before him, to portray Chinese nationalism as compatible with and beneficial to Pan-Asian regionalism.

While Liang Hongzhi blamed the KMT for throwing China into disorder and corrupting its politics with harmful, misconstrued Western ideas and militarist tendencies, Wang portrayed the KMT and the Three People’s Principles as integral to the welfare of Asia and indeed the world. As Wang’s argument shares a common basis with a similar argument from Chiang Kai-shek, we can say that this fundamental faith in a strong China being good for everyone (aside from imperialists) is a bedrock assumption of any Sunist. In his lecture “Implementing the Three People’s Principles and Pan-Asianism to Revive China and East Asia”, Wang builds a matryoshka-style argument for why the Three People’s Principles are integral to the development of East Asia. China, he says, is in a bad spot, and has lost its liberty and equality among nations due to the Opium Wars. To restore the liberty and equality of the Chinese nation, the Three People’s Principles must be implemented. To implement the Three People’s Principles, the warlords and Communists must be defeated, lest they try to crown themselves emperor like Yuan Shikai or establish a Communist Chinese state like Mao did in Jiangxi—that any Soviet was under the thumb of Moscow was beyond doubt for any KMT member, and Sovietism as a plot for Moscow to build a global empire was the subject of Madame Chiang Kai-shek’s *Conversations with Mikhail Borodin*. After discussing the concept of societal missions, he then states that the mission of the Chinese people, at this stage in time, was not to realize the Three People’s Principles; rather, it was to pacify and

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152 Ibid., 174-180.
reconstruct the nation so that the next generation may implement them, so that the next generation would enjoy the fruit of the established Republic.\(^{153}\)

This intersects with Pan-Asianism in a nationalistic way. Wang poses the notion that he is only advocating Pan-Asianism because the war went badly and China is now forced to cooperate with Japan; while plainly that was one reason he was advocating Pan-Asianism, he rejects the notion that Pan-Asianism is bad for China. Indeed, Wang frames Pan-Asianism not as a Japanese idea, but rather as an aspect of the Principle of Nationalism, referring to Sun’s Canton lecture series and stating that finding willing foreign allies to strengthen China’s international position had always been a goal of Sun’s. He then cites the specific example of allying with the Soviet Union, then discusses why allying with Japan is a natural extension of this idea. To prove Japan is a worthwhile ally, he notes the KMT revolutionary martyr Yamada Yoshimasa as an example of the deep ties between China and Japan, and as an example of Japanese support for Chinese nationalism.\(^{154}\) He finishes the speech by


Yamada Yoshimasa was a good friend and revolutionary ally of Sun Yat-sen. Sun had fled to Japan after the failure of the first Canton Uprising, and Yamada happened to be Sun’s neighbor there. Yamada, a former Chinese interpreter for the Imperial Japanese Army in the First Sino-Japanese War, paid Sun a visit one day. While talking, Yamada found himself so moved by Sun’s revolutionary vision that he pledged Sun his aid and joined the Revive China Society. As a member, he was tasked with procuring arms and other materiel for Sun’s mainland allies. He was dispatched as an envoy to Zheng Shiliang’s army during the Huizhou Uprising of 1900, and was executed by the Qing government for his role in supplying revolutionary groups.
linking Sino-Japanese cooperation as integral to the development of China, and to the development of East Asia. “All I know is, only if we restore peace between China and Japan can we achieve Sino-Japanese cooperation,” Wang says. “Only if we achieve Sino-Japanese cooperation, can we unify East Asia and realize the reconstruction of the Chinese Republic…” By preserving peace and continuing reconstruction, by establishing an Asia free of imperial domination, and by improving relations with neighbors, Wang argued that Sino-Japanese cooperation was the best way forward. In this way, Wang supplements his negative argument for collaboration with a positive one, one that is consistent with his lifelong emphasis on the priority of national reconstruction and the importance of realizing the Three People’s Principles.

However, while these are his words, how did he feel about them? Was Wang Jingwei sincere about Pan-Asianism, and does it really matter? Judging by his life and his writings, he was plainly a committed Chinese nationalist, but it is less clear how Wang felt about Pan-Asianism itself. He often went on record speaking about the importance of protecting China and East Asia from Britain and the US, even making the reclamation of the International Settlement in Shanghai a major initiative of his while in power. He delivered speeches in Tokyo and published articles supporting the Japanese war efforts against the US, against Chiang, and against the CCP while reviewing troops and bowing to portraits of Sun Yat-sen. In short, he certainly spoke the language of Pan-Asianism, but he never stopped speaking the language of Chinese nationalism either, and as Royama Masamichi insisted, Pan-Asianism transcended “petty” nationalism. Taking Royama into account, it seems as though

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155 Ibid., 2755.
Wang was not so much a Pan-Asianist as he was a Chinese nationalist who agreed with Pan-Asianism.

This is the problem with trying to gauge Wang’s sincerity regarding Pan-Asianism. As a politician seeking to realize his goals, Wang, like any politician, adapted his stance when convenient or necessary; this is apparent in prior discussion of the Tanggu Truce and in Wang’s decision to break with the CCP in mid-1927. In particular, his speeches and public writings were drafted and delivered with his audience in mind, and one’s public face does not necessarily match his actual thoughts. Wang, throughout his life, spoke at great length about the need for national reconstruction so that China could realize its potential as a powerful state and about the importance of peace for national reconstruction. No matter who he was allied with, he did not change his opinion regarding the importance of economic and institutional modernization, nor did he ever turn his back on the doctrine of Sun Yat-sen. Rather, he took great risks to pursue his own vision of national revival, facing the threats of execution, betrayal, imprisonment, exile, and assassination throughout his life.

While Wang spoke harshly of Japan in *On China’s Problems* and kindly in the Hanoi Telegram, the underlying ideas guiding his actions did not change. In this sense, Wang was a sincere Pan-Asianist in that he believed joining the Japanese order was better for China than continuing the war, and that China would benefit from friendly relations with its neighbors. It is important to note that, while Wang had more or less burned his bridges with Chungking after the issuance of the Hanoi Telegram, before that Chiang had invited him to return and his advisor Gao Zongwu
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(1905-1994) proposed he go to Europe instead of responding to Konoe’s 12-22-1938 telegram, which did not mention the withdrawal that Gao had been promised.\textsuperscript{156} Therefore, Wang had decided that cooperation with the Japanese, even under bad terms, was still better than allowing the war to continue. This was a decision motivated partly by a fear of outright Japanese conquest of China, and partly by the knowledge that the defense effort itself was destroying China. To Wang, peace was needed quickly. That the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere promised protection from Western imperialism, hardly a secret scourge of China, was a point in favor of cooperation with the Japanese as well.

However, no matter how Wang approached the positive argument, he was plainly more concerned with stopping the war than with joining the Japanese order. “Chiang’s Magnet War” is representative of his thoughts here. His strongest statements are against actions that prolong the destruction and chaos, his weakest those in favor of Japanese economic union. A lifelong nationalist, Wang sought to realize the reconstruction and revitalization of China, not to render it a Japanese colony. While Wang seemed to believe sincerely in the ideas behind Pan-Asianism, those of good neighborliness and economic cooperation among Asian nations, he was not so naive as to sincerely believe in the actual Japanese implementation of this philosophy. Rather, he had made his bed when he chose to leave Chungking and pursue peace from outside the government, and believed he could do more good for China working with the Japanese than hiding out with the United Front in the

Chungking bunkers. To this end, he pursued reconstruction as President of the
Nanjing regime, but no one can say that the Reorganized Government lived up to
Sun’s standards. This was the sour end of Wang’s idealistic, indirect, and ultimately
unsuccessful political career.
Conclusion

Wang Jingwei was many things. A poet, a revolutionary, the toast of his country and later its hated son, he wore so many hats it’s easy to forget that he was, first and foremost, a politician. He chose his words carefully, knew how to read an audience, and was meticulous in advancing his own agenda. Therefore, if we are to understand this controversial figure, it is important not to just look at what Wang said or did at any one point in time, but at the ideas he held dear throughout his life.

Of course, some might ask, “Why bother? Maybe he was a nationalist, but then he was tempted by greed and betrayed his nation because of it.” Although I see little evidence to support this claim, it is entirely possible; regardless, evaluating Wang’s life matters because Wang is one of the major figures in Republican Chinese history. He represents the civilian wing of the KMT, the leftist wing of a party largely known for rightist militarism and in the West identified with Chiang Kai-shek. He also provides a critical perspective into how Sun Yat-sen’s ideology was to be put into practice, being a close follower and confidant of the late leader. To study Wang Jingwei’s life is to study Republican China, and to evaluate his motivations in collaboration is to evaluate a truly bizarre idea: nationalistic collaboration. These are several reasons why Wang Jingwei matters, along with the more general reason that it is worthwhile to look past caricatures of historic heroes and villains and to get a better picture of who these people really were and what they actually did.

Wang Jingwei was a committed Chinese nationalist and a firm believer in Sun Yat-sen and his Three People’s Principles. Moreover, he was a believer in the potential of his country, one that could only be realized with extensive modernization.
and reconstruction. To this end, he sought to secure peace in China, peace that would allow the revitalization of the nation. Once China had been modernized, the Chinese people could recover their lost territory and sovereignty. Once the nation had been reconstructed and reunited, the KMT could finish consolidation efforts and realize the fruit of much blood, sweat, and labor: the full Republic of China, a strong Chinese democracy that combined the best of modernity with the best of tradition. The realization of this dream often seemed impossible, like a sparrow filling the sea with stones, but Wang Jingwei dedicated his life to this project. Even his collaboration with Japan, usually described as treason, was an effort to hasten the revival of China. To this end, he made friends enemies, and enemies friends, playing the political game while trying to realize his agenda. In the end, he was not successful. The Nanjing government was weak, and the Japanese government was less committed to Pan-Asianism than the Japanese political scientists were. He died in 1944 while on business in Nagoya, and was buried in a tomb in Nanjing. When Chiang and the Chungking government returned to Nanjing in 1945, he ordered Wang’s tomb blown to smithereens.

A lifelong poet and a lover of classical culture, Wang Zhaoming saw his turn to revolution akin to the girl Nüwa’s rebirth as the goddess Jingwei. No matter how small his wings, no matter how many pebbles and twigs he’d have to carry, he would not rest until the sea was filled, the revolution complete. Wang Jingwei, however, could only fly for so long. More like Nüwa than Jingwei, he fell into the vast and endless sea, slipping beneath the waves.
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