

## Reclaiming Confucius by Denouncing Japan: Chinese Scholars as Nation Builders in the 1920s-30s

The humiliating defeat of the Qing Dynasty to Japan, a country long considered to be China's cultural inferior, in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) triggered widespread intellectual debate on both what reforms were necessary for their weak country and, at a more theoretical level, what the entity "China" actually represented.<sup>1</sup> Most intellectuals decided that in order for China to survive the imperialist onslaught, modern nationalism was a preferable alternative to the *tianxia*, or "all under heaven," outlook. Unlike *tianxia*, a system based on Confucian morality in which a superior Chinese civilization (hypothetically) extended to all peoples, the modern nation-state was based on a shared political identity, territorial sovereignty, and a "sense of grouping" that extended beyond local and regional loyalties.

Particularly during the New Culture Movement (1915-1925), Chinese nationalist discourse largely rejected Confucianism and "traditional" Chinese values, which were seen as impediments to successful participation in the Western international system.<sup>2</sup> After the humiliating Paris Peace Conference and the subsequent student protests that triggered the May Fourth Movement, however, Chinese nationalism also took on a decidedly anti-imperialist, anti-Western tone.<sup>3</sup> Doubly betrayed by its own traditional culture and by the Shandong resolution, China "became a country without roots or external supports."<sup>4</sup> It was in this context, starting

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<sup>1</sup> Xiaoyuan Liu, "From Five 'Imperial Domains' to a 'Chinese Nation'," in *Ethnic China: Identity, Assimilation, and Resistance*, ed. Xiaobing Li and Patrick Fuliang Shan (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015), 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Xu Guoqi, "Nationalism, Internationalism, and National Identity: China from 1895 to 1919," in *Chinese Nationalism in Perspective: Historical and Recent Cases*, ed. C.X. George Wei and Xiaoyuan Liu (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 102-106.

<sup>3</sup> Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 145.

<sup>4</sup> As an Allied Power in World War I, Chinese delegates had high hopes for the Paris Peace Conference, seeking the return of Shandong Province and the establishment of equal relations for China with the West. These hopes were dashed, however, by the decision to transfer German concessions in Shandong to Japan, triggering the protests of May 4, 1919. Xu, 116-117.

with the Twenty-One Demands (1915), that Japanese military aggression began to noticeably increase, escalating with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and reaching its climax in the brutal Second Sino-Japanese War (in Chinese, “War of Resistance Against Japan,” or *kangri zhanzheng*).<sup>5</sup>

As many respected scholars of Sino-Japanese relations have shown, as Japanese military aggression continued to intensify, Chinese scholarship on Japan flourished.<sup>6</sup> A wide array of journals and book series was published on Japan’s culture, militarism, and the consequences for China. This scholarship critiqued Japanese imperialism, as well as *bushido*, and sought to discover its cultural roots.<sup>7</sup> This essay adds to the current repertoire of scholarship on Sino-Japanese relations by highlighting a surprising trend in these writings on Japan. Despite the strong anti-traditional nationalism characteristic of the May Fourth Movement, many Chinese intellectuals framed traditional Confucian culture in very positive terms when writing about Japan. This cannot merely be attributed to Chiang Kaishek’s New Life Movement, which was overall ineffective.<sup>8</sup> Rather, this essay argues that Chinese national identity during the war years

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<sup>5</sup> The Twenty-One Demands were a set of demands presented to the then-leader of China, Yuan Shikai, by Japanese Prime Minister Okuma Shigenobu on January 18, 1915. If agreed to, this would essentially have made China a Japanese protectorate.

<sup>6</sup> These respected scholars include Joshua Fogel, Oleg Benesch, and Lu Yan. Fogel’s “New Directions and Old in Chinese Japanology” reviews PRC authors Wu Anlong and Xiong Dayun’s *A History of Chinese Japanology*, a book that examines Chinese scholarship on Japan from its inception through the end of the 1980s, when it was published in Japan. Although Fogel critiques the limitations of Wu and Xiong’s analysis, he still considers it the most comprehensive study on Chinese scholarship on Japan during this time period. Oleg Benesch’s “The Samurai Next Door: Chinese Examinations of the Japanese Martial Spirit” focuses on Chinese scholarly analyses of *bushido* from 1895 to 2015 and how this has not only shaped Chinese views of Japan, but also reflects China’s own nationalistic concerns. Lu Yan’s *Re-understanding Japan: Chinese Perspectives, 1895-1945*, provides an in-depth look at the lives of Dai Jitao, Jiang Baili, Zhou Zuoren, and Guo Moruo and how these four men interacted with, perceived, and were shaped by their contact with Japanese culture.

<sup>7</sup> Joshua Fogel, “New Directions and Old in Chinese Japanology,” *The Cultural Dimension of Sino-Japanese Relations: Essays on the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1995), 145.

<sup>8</sup> Chiang initiated the conservative New Life Movement in September 1934 under the influence of German fascism and militarism. The movement incorporated both Christian and Confucian values in its effort to “produce a thoroughly disciplined society.” However, this movement did not reach out to the masses, and was largely

drew upon “traditional” concepts of Chinese civilization under the *tianxia* system, in which China was culturally superior to Japan. The trope of “civilized” versus “barbarian,” originally utilized in China to distinguish those who followed Confucian precepts from those that did not, was also frequently utilized in writings on Japan during the war years.<sup>9</sup>

Why would Chinese intellectuals embrace an identity in writing about Japan that had been so thoroughly eschewed by the May Fourth Movement? As this essay will demonstrate, this was not a wholesale embrace of Confucian ideals, but only a method to bolster Chinese national confidence vis-à-vis Japan. China’s hot-and-cold relationship with Japan had lasted for centuries, and the framework for the majority of the duration of this relationship was the tributary system and a civilizational, rather than a nation-state, framework of identity. The overlap of a civilizational, cultural narrative of China with a political, national identity shows that these two conceptions of “China” are not necessarily opposing or mutually exclusive, but rather can be utilized in tandem.

As Akira Iriye notes, Chinese self-identity as a weak country subjugated to foreign imperialism shifted during the Second Sino-Japanese War to a more confident perspective. China had become an ally of the United States and Britain, fighting for democracy and peace.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, China’s confidence vis-à-vis the Western dominated international scene was bolstered after Chiang’s government became one of the “Big Four” in World War II. However, this does not explain how China was able to endure four years of war against Japan, from 1937-1941,

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undercut by the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Peter Gue Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution: 1895-1949* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 255-263.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the different usages of the “barbarian” trope in Chinese history, see Frank Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Iriye, 232.

alone.<sup>11</sup> I believe that Chinese nationalism vis-à-vis Japan drew on a much different framework than vis-à-vis the West during the war, which can be seen in the writings of Chinese intellectuals on Japan. This article highlights the shift in Chinese identity from imperialist victim to moral victor in writings on Japan during wartime, demonstrating that Chinese writings on Japan during war were framed by the pressing need for self-identification, particularly in juxtaposition to the enemy they were fighting. Much of Chinese scholarship on Japan at this time strengthened the notion of Chinese cultural unity, juxtaposing an older, more sophisticated civilization with a more primitive and barbaric Japan.

This article will examine the writings of four leading Chinese intellectuals who were so-called “Japan-experts” and wrote extensively on Sino-Japanese relations during the war era of 1931-1945, when the brunt of Japanese military aggression was taking place. Dai Jitao, Zhou Zuoren, Jiang Baili, and Guo Moruo all spent extensive time in Japan and gained in-depth knowledge of Japanese culture and society, which gives their work greater scholarly credibility.<sup>12</sup> These four men were from extremely different backgrounds and had a wide array of political leanings. Even so, as this article will show, they all shared a certain sociocultural lens through which they viewed Japan, even if the contours of this lens differed. This article will focus on Dai Jitao’s *On Japan (Ribei lun)* (1927); Zhou Zuoren’s “A Limited View of Japan” (*Riben guankui*); Jiang Baili’s *The Japanese: A Foreigner’s Analysis (Ribei ren: yi ge waiguoren de yanjiu)*; and Guo Moruo’s “Japan’s Past, Present, and Future” (*Riben de guoqu, xianzai, weilai*) (1937). The first section of this article will examine these authors’ personal backgrounds and

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<sup>11</sup> For a compelling read on China’s resistance to Japan before and after it joined the Allies, see Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II, 1937-1945* (New York: First Mariner Books, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> I am aware that these are also the four men analyzed in Lu Yan’s *Re-understanding Japan*. As mentioned above, Lu provides valuable biographical information on these Japan experts in light of their extensive interactions with Japanese culture and society. However, this article adds to Lu’s analysis by focusing in particular on how these Chinese scholars perceived *China* as juxtaposed with Japan in their writings.

their views on Japanese culture. The second section will analyze their views on *bushido* and Japanese military aggression. Lastly, an overall conclusion will be drawn on what the implications of these perspectives are for perceptions of “China” among Chinese scholars in the context of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

## Views on Japanese Culture

There was a shared acknowledgment among Dai Jitao, Zhou Zuoren, Jiang Baili, and Guo Moruo of Japan’s cultural debt to China. In particular, China was credited with transferring the culture necessary to form the basis of Japanese civilization during the Tang and Sui Dynasties. The positive influence of Confucianism on Japanese society was highlighted, and Chinese society as a whole was portrayed as morally superior to Japan. This is not to say that all four authors viewed Japanese culture as a mere derivative of Chinese culture. Certainly, out of the four scholars, Guo was the most dismissive of Japan, Zhou was very fond of Japanese culture, and Dai and Jiang fell somewhere in the middle. It cannot be denied, however, that all four scholars perceived Japan as China’s cultural benefactor.

One of the earliest comprehensive studies written by a Chinese scholar on Japan during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was Dai Jitao’s *On Japan (Ribei Lun)* (1927). Dai had studied abroad in Japan from 1905 to 1909, at the height of the *liu ri* (study in Japan) movement.<sup>13</sup> After returning to Shanghai, he had taken up journalism and become a notorious anti-Manchu revolutionary.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> During the first decade of the twentieth century, an unprecedented volume of Chinese students studied abroad in Japan. This was encouraged by Qing reformers, who believed the Japanese example could help China modernize most efficiently. The movement reached its peak from 1905-1906. For a more detailed analysis of this movement, see Douglas Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xinzhen Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Although Chinese revolutionary movements, including Sun Yatsen’s Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenghui*) abounded in Japan, it was only after returning to China that Dai really became devoted to the revolutionary cause. Dissatisfied with the Qing’s apparent inability to counter imperial aggression, revolutionaries like Sun Yatsen, Chen

Dai's attitude toward Japan shifted multiple times over the next decade. In his early years of journalism, he had expressed strong anti-Japanese sentiments, particularly after the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. Due to his excellent command of the Japanese language, he had become Sun Yatsen's translator and secretary, and by 1913 he had become one of the strongest advocates of Pan-Asianism. Although Dai continued to champion Sino-Japanese cooperation, however, he quickly became disillusioned with Japanese foreign policy after the Twenty-One Demands and the May Fourth Movement.<sup>15</sup> "My View of Japan" was originally written as an article in 1919, when Dai had just returned from an unsuccessful trip to Japan to solicit support for the Guomindang (GMD).<sup>16</sup> After Dai's failed attempt at a good-will mission for rapprochement between the GMD and Japan in 1927, he decided to revise and expand "My View of Japan" into a full-length book, *On Japan*.<sup>17</sup>

In *On Japan*, Dai highlighted China's traditional culture and called attention to how much of Japanese culture had been borrowed from China. Not only was there an "over tenfold" territorial and population discrepancy between China and Japan, but there was also a cultural discrepancy of several thousand years. During China's cultural golden age, Dai contended, the Japanese were still "barbarians living in caves."<sup>18</sup> It was not until Japan had absorbed Chinese

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Tianhua, Zou Rong, Zhang Binglin, and Chen Tianhua sought to equate the Han race with the Chinese nation and construct a new collective identity that excluded the Manchus. Kai-wing Chow, "Zhang Binglin and the Invention of the Han 'Race'," in *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, ed. Frank Dikotter (London: Hurst and Company, 1997), 37.

<sup>15</sup> Lu Yan, *Re-understanding Japan: Chinese Perspectives, 1895-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 67-84.

<sup>16</sup> At this point, Dai was a member of the GMD Executive Committee and worked as the Republican government's information minister. Oleg Benesch, "The Samurai Next Door: Chinese Examinations of the Japanese Martial Spirit," *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 38 (2014): 145-146.

<sup>17</sup> Lu, 156

<sup>18</sup> In describing "China's cultural golden age" (*zhongguo wenhua de huangjin shidai*), Dai is most likely referring to the Tang Dynasty, in which tributary relations between a newly centralized power in Japan and the Tang court in China established increasing cultural contact between the two countries. For a detailed history, see Wang Zhenping, *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals: China-Japan Relations in the Han-Tang Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

culture that a unified Japanese nation was created.<sup>19</sup> For Dai, even Japan's success in the Meiji Restoration was directly related to the adoption of the Chinese concept of benevolence, or *ren ai*, during the Tokugawa era.<sup>20</sup>

Similar to Dai, Guo Moruo saw Chinese cultural influence as essential in the formation of Japanese civilization. However, Guo utilized a harsher, angrier tone in referring to the Japanese, which was likely due to a combination of personal experience and wartime realities. Guo had only been studying in Japan for a year when news of the Twenty-One Demands emerged. Although he spent the majority of the next two decades in Japan, he showed little interest in Japanese culture.<sup>21</sup> The years before the outbreak of war between China and Japan were dramatic for Guo, who had become a prolific writer of history, archaeology, fiction and poetry, on a personal level. As a prominent member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), he was endangered by the GMD's communist purge in 1927 and fled to Tokyo, where he resided in exile for the next ten years. In 1937, with the outbreak of war, he secretly escaped back to China after learning that GMD officials now wanted him to return to aid in the national crisis.<sup>22</sup>

As president of the *Salvation Daily*, a CCP-run newspaper in Shanghai, Guo wrote prolifically on Japan in articles that were widely distributed as anti-Japanese propaganda.<sup>23</sup> During the war years, Guo personally rose to great acclaim, both as a patriotic propagandist and

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<sup>19</sup> For "nation," Dai uses the term *minzu*, which combines the idea of a people (*min*) with a common ancestry (*zu*). The concept of nationalism (*minzuzhuyi*) had actually been translated into Chinese from the Japanese *minzokushugi* at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and had been influential in Han Chinese anti-Manchu revolutionary rhetoric. Dikotter, 61, 69.

<sup>20</sup> Dai Jitao, *Riben Lun* [On Japan], in *Riben Ren Si Shu*, ed. Inazo Nitobe, et. al., (Wuhan: Wuhan Chu Ban She, 2009), 227, 264.

<sup>21</sup> Li Zhao Zhong, ed., *Kan bu Tou de Riben Zhongguo Wenhua Jing Ying Yan Zhong de Riben* (Beijing: Dong Fang Chu Ban She, 2006), 65-67.

<sup>22</sup> Lu, 173-185.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*, 188-191.

a famous intellectual in Wuhan and Chongqing.<sup>24</sup> It was in this context that Guo wrote “Japan’s Past, Present, and Future” (*Riben de guoqu, xianzai, weilai*) (1937). Similar to Dai’s analysis, Guo viewed the Japanese as uncivilized until the increased amount of cultural contact with China during the Sui and Tang dynasties, when “like an ignited electric charge,” Japan’s development was suddenly triggered. There was a significant number of “us Chinese” that assisted Japanese students abroad to the greatest of their abilities, imparting Chinese civilization to them in the process. According to Guo, then, due to the significant cultural transfer from China, Japan was able to proceed directly from the Stone Age to the Iron Age, skipping the Bronze Age of technological development completely. However, Guo was indignant that in spite of China’s generosity in “civilizing” Japan, the Japanese had become ungrateful.<sup>25</sup>

The indignation Guo felt toward Japan can be seen even more clearly in his earlier autobiographical novel, *The Hardships of Travel* (*Xing Lu Nan*) (1925), in which he wrote about his frustration at Japanese ingratitude and how they belittled the Chinese, particularly with their sneering phrase “*Shina*.”<sup>26</sup> In light of how indebted Japan was to China as its cultural benefactor, Japanese disrespect towards China became even more unbelievable. In startlingly chauvinistic terms, Guo declared that by the time of China’s Qin dynasty, the Japanese were still “barbarians,” probably “eating coconuts in the South Sea.”<sup>27</sup> Guo’s hostile reaction becomes

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<sup>24</sup> Guo retreated with the Nationalist government in the face of the Japanese military onslaught – first from Nanjing to Wuhan, and then from Wuhan to Chongqing. Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58-59.

<sup>25</sup> Guo Moruo, *Riben de Guoqu, Xianzai, Weilai* [Japan’s Past, Present, and Future], *Guo Moruo Quan Ji, Wenxue Pian, Di 18 Juan, Mang Chang Yan, Duan Duan Ji, Yu Shu Ji* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chu Ban She, 1992), 202-203.

<sup>26</sup> *Shina*, pronounced as “*Zhi na*” in Chinese, was the most commonly used term in Japan to refer to China from the Meiji era until 1945. Although *Shina* in and of itself did not have any derogatory connotations, Guo strongly condemned the way it was enunciated by the Japanese in speech. Joshua Fogel, “The Sino-Japanese Controversy over *Shina* as a Toponym for China,” *The Cultural Dimension of Sino-Japanese Relations, Essays on the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1995), 67-72.

<sup>27</sup> The Qin dynasty was recognized as the initial unification of China proper. Although heavy-handed, it introduced influential reforms to China such a standardized writing system, unified weights and measures, and widespread



more understandable, however, with the autobiographical background in mind. In his novel, Guo made this comment after narrating an event based on a humiliating personal incident. While living in poverty in Japan, Guo had been looking for an affordable residence for himself and his family. After amicably chatting with a hospitable landlady who seemed ready to offer him an apartment at a reasonable price, Guo's identity as a "*shinajin*" was discovered.<sup>28</sup> The landlady and the landlord, who had just returned home, reacted as follows to "Ai-mu," Guo's autobiographical penname:

The man glanced at him with eyes more ferocious than a hunting dog's.  
Hmm, your gracious country? Shanghai? Or Korea?  
*Ah, the guy has seen through me! How shameful! How shameful! Great!*  
"I am a Chinese student."  
"Ah, is that *shinajin*? Thunder rolled out of the landlady's mouth.  
*Ah, damn it! Damn it!* Ai-mu thought, but he could not say anything.  
"Do you want to rent a house? You probably cannot find one here. Our empty room is for the Ping-Pong table."<sup>29</sup>

Guo's humiliation was by no means uncommon. During the turn of the century, Chinese students in Japan were often astounded by the rapid pace of Japanese modernization and ashamed, in turn, that "yesterday's master teacher [China]" was now inferior to the student [Japan].<sup>30</sup>

Unlike Guo, who criticized Japanese arrogance, Zhou Zuoren criticized *Chinese* arrogance as a major impediment to improvement in Sino-Japanese relations. Like Dai, Zhou had become an anti-Manchu revolutionary while studying in Japan, where he was exposed to a wide variety of political ideas. Zhou had followed his older brother, who would later be known by the pen name Lu Xun, to study in 1905, and remained in Japan for six years. Zhou fell in love with Japanese culture for what ironically had made Guo so indignant – the authentic Chinese cultural roots found in Japanese society, particularly reminiscent of the Tang Dynasty. Despite his alarm

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transportation networks. This was several hundred years after Confucius, and Guo seemed to be highlighting how culturally advanced China's civilization was compared with Japan's. Li, 63.

<sup>28</sup> "*Shinajin*" meant "Chinese person" in Japanese at the time.

<sup>29</sup> Guo Moruo, *Ganlan* [Olive] (Shanghai: Xiandai shuju, 1929), 95, quoted in Lu, 106-107.

<sup>30</sup> Reynolds, 62.

at rising Japanese militarism, Zhou remained optimistic about the potential for cooperation between China and Japan even in the 1920s. He urged his peers to more seriously study and emulate Japan, and felt that the Chinese should be grateful to Japan for its “creative emulation” of both Chinese and Western culture.<sup>31</sup>

By the 1930s, Zhou had distanced himself from politics due to his profound disillusionment with both repressive Japanese legislation and Chinese nationalistic propaganda. However, after visiting Japan in 1934 and observing the shocking militarization of society for himself, he decided to return to the political scene in China and began his series “A Limited View on Japan” (*Riben guankui*) in Beijing.<sup>32</sup> The first installment was published in the influential Chinese journal *National News Weekly* in 1935. The fourth and final installment was published in the aftermath of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937.<sup>33</sup> Rather than flee Beijing with his intellectual peers, Zhou chose to remain behind and eventually accepted a post as a minister education for the Manchukuo puppet regime’s North Chinese Political committee.<sup>34</sup> This earned him the label of “*hanjian*” (Han traitor) among many of his former colleagues, and his “collaboration” with the Japanese occupiers was never forgiven.<sup>35</sup>

In writing his first chapter of “A Limited View on Japan,” Zhou was clear to remind his readers that despite the fact that Japan was a foreign country, its cultural roots remained the same

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<sup>31</sup> Lu, 51-55, 129-131.

<sup>32</sup> At this point in time, Zhou was more famous than his brother, Lu Xun, who would eventually be recognized as China’s greatest modern writer. Lary, 59.

<sup>33</sup> The Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 7, 1937, which took place in the city of Wanping to the south of Beijing, is often used to mark the official start of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

<sup>34</sup> Lu, 221-224, 228-231.

<sup>35</sup> The anger that Zhou Zuoren’s colleagues felt at what they saw as his betrayal of the war of resistance can be seen in a scathing letter published in *Kangzhan wenyi* on May 14, 1938, that was signed by 18 major intellectuals. A sample of the language used: “Unless what you did was accidental, we feel that the basic reason for your making friends of the enemy must lie in your long-standing disdain for the Chinese people and your pessimism about them.” “Open Letter to Zhou Zuoren,” ed. Zhang Junxiang, et. al., *Zhou Zuoren nianpu* [Chronology of Zhou Zuoren] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2000), 550-552, quoted in Lary, 75.

as China's.<sup>36</sup> He wrote the first chapter in May of 1935, when the Minobe Controversy in Japan was at its peak.<sup>37</sup> Alarmed at the increasingly repressive nature of Japan's current political trends, Zhou criticized what he deemed the Japanese cultural weaknesses of "narrowness of mind" and violence. However, unlike Guo, Zhou still retained an overall positive view of Japanese culture and was particularly drawn to the Japanese fondness of beauty, which he saw as lacking among the Chinese.<sup>38</sup> By the time Zhou sent his fourth and final installment to *National News Weekly* in 1937, though, his tone had become noticeably more exasperated. He was confused and bewildered at the Japanese military's actions in China, coming from a country whose culture so deeply resonated with him. Once again, he mentioned the pervasive and long-lasting influence of Chinese culture, particularly from the Sui and Tang dynasties, in Japanese society. However, Zhou accused Japan of no longer being grateful for the massive cultural debt it owed China in light of China's recent decline.<sup>39</sup>

Like Zhou, Jiang Baili was also fascinated with Japanese culture, although he did not share so positive a view on it. As a Chinese military trainer educated at the Imperial Japanese Army Academy, Jiang's views of Japanese culture were closely tied up with *bushido* and will thus be discussed in more detail below. For now, suffice it to say that Jiang's views on Japanese culture overlapped with Dai, Zhou, and Guo. In his exceedingly popular article series, *The Japanese: A Foreigner's Analysis (Ribennren: Yi ge waiguoren de yanjiu)* (1937), Jiang, too, highlighted China's extensive cultural contributions to Japan, including a writing system (*kanji*),

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<sup>36</sup> Zhou Zuoren, "Ribenn Guankui" [A Limited View of Japan], in *Zhou Zhouren Wen Lei Pian 7 Ribenn Guankui Ribenn – Riwen – Ri Ren*, ed. Zhong Shu He (Changsha: Hunan Wen Yi Chubanshe, 1998), 18-19.

<sup>37</sup> After scholar Minobe Tatsukichi argued for a liberal interpretation of the emperor's role in government, the Japanese political right wing condemned his idea in the Diet. In further retaliation, the Japanese government banned three of Minobe's books, an act that sought to suppress liberal discourse more generally. Lu, 224.

<sup>38</sup> Zhou, 19-23.

<sup>39</sup> Zhou Zuoren, "Ribenn Guankui Zhi Si" [A Limited View of Japan Part Four], in *Kan bu Tou de Ribenn Zhongguo Wenhua Jing Ying Yan Zhong de Ribenn*, ed. Li Zhao Zhong (Beijing: Dong Fang Chu Ban She, 2006), 56-62.

Confucianism, and Buddhism. Like both Dai and Guo, Jiang was quick to point out that Japan did not acquire these foundations of Chinese civilization until around a thousand years after the birth of Confucius, highlighting again how much older and more mature Chinese civilization was.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, similar to Dai, Jiang attributed the positive developments in the Meiji Restoration to China's cultural influence, and dismissed its militarism as a "deviation" caused by a combination of native Japanese culture and pernicious Western influences.<sup>41</sup>

Why was it so important for Chinese intellectuals to highlight the moral superiority of ancient Chinese civilization, particularly in light of the New Culture Movement's rejection of "traditional" values? First, it is important to note that in particular, the hierarchical nature of Confucianism and its "five relationships" were blamed for the suppression of individual enlightenment, which was one of the key goals of intellectuals in the New Culture Movement.<sup>42</sup> However, the increasingly anti-imperialist tone of Chinese nationalism after May 4, 1919 led to greater tension between what Vera Schwarcz deems "the external imperatives of *jiuguo* (national salvation) with the internal prerequisites of *qimeng* (enlightenment)."<sup>43</sup> In light of increasing external aggression from Japan, the imperative of national salvation won out. Second, we must recognize that what was defined as "Confucianism" in the May Fourth movement was incredibly vague and equated with "tradition" and all societal ills in China. Thus, attacks against Confucianism formed an unstable rhetoric that was fluid and subject to reinterpretation. In

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<sup>40</sup> Jiang Baili, *Er, Ji Duan Lishi Shiji* [Chapter Two, A Few Paragraphs on Historical Achievements], in *Ribenren: Yi ge waiguoren de yanjiu* [The Japanese: A Foreigner's Analysis] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Press Group Digital Media Ltd., 2014), Kindle eBook.

<sup>41</sup> Benesch, 149-151.

<sup>42</sup> The "five relationships" were between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brother, and older and younger friend. For radicals such as Chen Duxiu, the hierarchical relationships of ruler-subject, father-son, and husband-wife had been particularly harmful by perpetuating filial piety and subordinating women. Peter Gue Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution 1895-1949* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 138.

<sup>43</sup> Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 1.

particular, it is interesting to note that Chinese intellectuals writing on Japan hardly ever referred to the hierarchical relationships of Confucianism, but references to values such as benevolence abounded. Thus, it is clear that in the sociopolitical context in which they were writing, these scholars were able to selectively draw upon those aspects of the past that would most strengthen Chinese morale vis-à-vis Japan in what was essentially an exercise in nation-building. This was also the case in the authors' treatment of *bushido* and Japanese militarism.

### Views on Bushido and Militarism

*Bushido*, translated as “the way of the warrior,” was a largely invented code of martial values closely associated with Japanese society that has served as “a barometer of national identities in China and Japan alike.”<sup>44</sup> Out of the four men examined in this article, Jiang Baili had the most optimistic view of *bushido*, at least initially. Jiang first arrived in Japan in 1901, at the very beginning of the *liu ri* movement. The subsequent year, after meeting the influential Qing reformer Liang Qichao, Jiang became the part-time editor of *Journal of the New Citizen* and the full-time editor of the new revolutionary journal, *Tides of Zhejiang*. Jiang was a prolific writer during his time abroad, writing extensively on current events and Chinese nationalism. In one of his more better-known serialized editorials, “On National Soul,” Jiang emphasized the need for the Chinese to develop a stronger self-consciousness in order to strengthen the nation.<sup>45</sup>

As a pragmatic individual, Jiang reasoned that Japan would be the best model for China to emulate for its reforms, particularly in military affairs, and sought to apply *bushido* to the Baoding Military Academy when he became its president in 1912. In protest against the

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<sup>44</sup> As Benesch aptly notes, *bushido* is largely a modern invention, “interpretations of which have tended to reflect the conditions under which they were formulated.” Benesch, 130-132.

<sup>45</sup> Lu, 25-29.

inefficient, corrupt structure of Baoding, he unsuccessfully attempted suicide, a gesture that brought him great respect from those unhappy with the status quo. After his resignation from the presidency at Baoding, he accepted a position as a military adviser in the Republican government. His attempted suicide, combined with Japan's Twenty-One Demands, convinced Jiang that *bushido* was not an apt tool for China.<sup>46</sup> He became even more critical of Japanese militarism after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and was appointed as a senior military adviser on the National Government's Military Committee in 1935. Two years later, after the initial outbreak of war with Japan, Jiang wrote *The Japanese: A Foreigner's Analysis*, published as a series of articles after the Nationalist government had retreated from its capital of Nanjing to Wuhan. Regarding the effect of *The Japanese*, which Jiang clearly wrote with Chinese war morale in mind, a contemporary later reported that the articles became "his beacon of optimism" in continuing to resist Japan.<sup>47</sup>

As Jiang explained in the preface to his articles, he sought to examine the roots of Japan's current "tragedy." His first section of *The Japanese* resembled an ethnography and examined some "natural" factors in Japan's cultural development: climate, geography, fish, alcohol, music, and flowers. He attributed what he observed as the short-tempered, pessimistic nature of the Japanese to a natural environment that was in constant flux, in which there were earthquakes and volcanic eruptions without warning.<sup>48</sup> He would later develop this idea further, comparing

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<sup>46</sup> The Baoding Military Academy was China's first officers' academy. Benesch, 149.

<sup>47</sup> *The Japanese: A Foreigner's Analysis* was published in *Dagongbao*, the most widely read journal in China at the time, and was so popular that *Dagongbao* had to print ten thousand extra copies per issue during the article's serialization. During the initial war years, Jiang also wrote several other articles, including "The Premises of [China's] Resistance War" (1937) and "The Causes and Consequences of the One-Year-Old Resistance War" (1938). Lu, 194-216.

<sup>48</sup> Jiang, *Yi, Ji ge Ziran Tiaojian* [Chapter One, A Few Natural Conditions].

Japanese politics, which he saw as fundamentally unstable, to a “daily dance on top of a volcano.”<sup>49</sup> Jiang continued to observe tragedy in Japanese society’s fundamental contradictory nature, which he illustrated by highlighting cherry blossoms, symbolic of beauty, and warriors, which represented *bushido*. Cherry blossoms were the most beautiful right before they wilted, noted Jiang, and warriors were the most valiant right before they lost their lives in battle.<sup>50</sup>

Jiang linked Japanese culture as a whole with *bushido* in particular not only by highlighting the latter’s inherently tragic nature, but also, surprisingly, through his discussion on the Japanese tradition of eating raw fish. Japan’s abundance of fish had, according to Jiang, influenced the Japanese character. He directly connected seppuku, the violent practice of samurai suicide by disembowelment, with the ancient custom of slicing open carp for sword practice. Jiang believed this custom of eating freshly killed fish pointed to the cruel, ruthless nature of the Japanese, who “still retained the islanders’ inheritance of cannibalism.” Furthermore, Jiang contrasted this with Confucian morality, claiming that the Japanese did not understand the sage Mencius’ advice that “when a gentleman hears the screams of animals, he cannot bear to eat their meat” (*wen qi sheng bu ren chi qi rou*), and therefore he “stays away from the kitchen” (*junzi yuan paochu*).<sup>51</sup> Here, Jiang strongly implied the superiority of Chinese Confucian morality to the “barbaric” and militaristic customs of the Japanese that endured to the present.

Dai Jitao also explored the historical roots of *bushido*, which for him was a source of both criticism and admiration. His analysis of *bushido* is particularly important to understand because, although largely unknown outside of China, it is still widely utilized by Chinese

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<sup>49</sup> Jiang, *Qi, Zhengzhi* [Chapter Seven, Politics].

<sup>50</sup> Jiang, Chapter One; This characterization of Japanese society is very similar to American anthropologist Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, published eight years later. Fogel, “New Directions and Old in Chinese Japanology,” 145.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*; Charles A. Muller, trans., “Mencius (Selections),” accessed April 4, 2016, <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/mencius.html>.

scholars to this day.<sup>52</sup> In his critique, Dai was clear to emphasize that the current, aggressive Japanese militarism was not a result of Chinese or Indian cultural influence, but rather stemmed from Japanese Shintoism, which he viewed as a dangerous, superstitious mythology.<sup>53</sup> According to him, before Confucianism was introduced to Japan, samurai had been violent and exploitative.<sup>54</sup> However, the adoption of Confucian benevolence had nurtured the positive aspects of *bushido*, such as the samurai's unwavering loyalty to his lord and his willingness to sacrifice himself. This Confucian benevolence, argued Dai, was a major reason behind the success of Japan's Meiji Restoration. Unfortunately, the virtuous, chivalrous side of *bushido*, which had been cultivated under Chinese cultural influence, had largely been lost due to the rise of capitalist, mercantile avarice. In contrast, the brutal side of *bushido*, which was rooted in native Shintoism, had remained.<sup>55</sup>

Similar to Dai, Zhou Zuoren, writing in the first installment of "A Limited View of Japan," also saw the *bushido* promoted by Japanese militarism as a corruption of an older, more noble tradition, which had departed from its original legacy to become an "instrument of violence." Although Zhou strongly criticized what he viewed as the Japanese cultural weaknesses of violence and "narrowness of mind," in 1935 he still appreciated many aspects of Japanese culture.<sup>56</sup> By the time he wrote the fourth installment of his article in 1937, however, Zhou was far more openly critical of Japan than he had been previously, manifesting the feelings of helplessness and despair that he now harbored in light of the onset of war.<sup>57</sup> Even in light of

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<sup>52</sup> Not only was Dai's book *Riben Lun* one of the first comprehensive studies of Japan by a Chinese scholar, but it is still one of the principle sources Chinese scholars use for a theoretical framework to analyze *bushido*, along with Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* and Nitobe Inazo's *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*. Notably, *On Japan* is the only Chinese source included in this bushido canon. Benesch, 159.

<sup>53</sup> Dai, 232.

<sup>54</sup> Benesch, 146.

<sup>55</sup> Dai, 227-235.

<sup>56</sup> Benesch, 152; Zhou Zuoren, *Riben Guankui*, 19-25.

<sup>57</sup> Lu, 227-228.



his increasing disillusion with Japanese military aggression, however, Zhou still remained careful to separate Japanese culture from Japanese militarism, and reminded his readers that it was essential to understand both facets of contemporary Japan. It would be wrong to love Japanese culture and ignore its military brutality, and equally wrong to hate Japanese brutality and conclude that Japan was a cultureless society.

By way of conclusion, Zhou admitted that while he could comfortably discuss Japanese culture, he remained bewildered by both Shintoism, Japanese cruelty, and what he saw as the unsolvable contradictions between the good, the bad, and the ugly.<sup>58</sup> As he bluntly and sarcastically noted:

For years I have kept in mind a big puzzle when seeing the contradictory phenomena of the Japanese nation, and I have not yet found an answer. The Japanese love beauty...yet they seem to be not at all afraid of doing ugly things toward China. The Japanese are very nimble...yet their behavior is so clumsy. The Japanese love to stay clean...yet their behavior is so dirty and mean as to force others to throw up. This is indeed a great wonder, or perhaps a miracle, under heaven.<sup>59</sup>

After the Japanese invaded in Beijing, Zhou withdrew from public life as much as possible, only reemerging onto the literary scene in 1939. It is perhaps telling that at this point in time, he radically switched his views on Confucius. During the May Fourth Era, Zhou had been in the anti-Confucian camp; however, in light of the Japanese occupation, he reclaimed this part of his cultural heritage. Zhou sought to recover the “spirit of pristine Confucianism,” which he believed was pragmatic in nature but had been sullied by the incorrect interpretations of scholars in the Han and Song dynasties.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike Zhou, there was no such inner turmoil present in Guo Moruo’s “Japan’s Past, Present, and Future.” (Of course, Guo’s main goal in publishing articles for *Salvation Daily* was

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<sup>58</sup> Zhou Zuoren, *Riben Guankui Zhi Si*, 56-62.

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*; “Riben guankui zhi si” [A Limited View of Japan Part Four], in *Zhitang yiyou wenbian* (Hong Kong: Sanyu tushu wenju gongsi, 1962), 162, quoted in Lu, 228.

<sup>60</sup> Lu, 230-233.

to incite national fervor and encourage the war effort.) Guo's fury at Japanese arrogance was palpable – not only had the Japanese refused to thank their older brother, but they had instead begun to wreak cruel havoc on China, particularly after the Mukden Incident of 1931.<sup>61</sup> He warned that Japan's barbaric actions that had so disturbed China's "peace" would not be easily forgotten, and that it had stirred up increasing hatred among the Chinese people. The fate of the "ingrates" would be total and utter destruction.<sup>62</sup>

The resurgence of Confucian rhetoric, which has had such a long and rich legacy in Chinese history, is perhaps not as surprising as it may appear. Indeed, it is natural that during what arguably marked the period of greatest collective suffering for the Chinese people, Chinese scholars would search for answers, and that these answers would often be connected with their cultural heritage.<sup>63</sup> In fact, similar to the ongoing debates in the West and Japan, Chinese scholars are also still searching for answers concerning Japanese militarism. After the Mao years, there was a scholarly resurgence of interest in *bushido* in the 1980s that continues to this day in both the PRC and Taiwan. Similar to the intellectuals analyzed above, Chinese scholars even today tend to view *bushido* through a Sinocentric lens. Either they insist on the "traditional" nature of Japanese militarism and deny any cultural connection with China, or they focus on the positive aspects of *bushido* in triggering Japan's modernization, in which China's role is unsurprisingly exaggerated. These two trends play a major role in the continuing dichotomy of Japan as a "martial country" and China as one that "emphasizes civil virtues."<sup>64</sup> This has serious

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<sup>61</sup> Simply referred to as "*jiu yi ba*," or "918," in Chinese, the Mukden or Manchurian Incident of September 18, 1931 led to the Japanese military invasion and occupation of Manchuria in Northeastern China.

<sup>62</sup> Guo, 204-206.

<sup>63</sup> According to Wang Zheng, who studies the role of historical memory in Chinese patriotic education, the Second Sino-Japanese War is considered to be the most destructive Asian war during the twentieth century. Wang Zheng, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 59-60.

<sup>64</sup> Benesch, 129-131.

implications for potential reconciliation between the two nations, whose relations have far too often been bound by the shackles of the past.

## Conclusion

Although Chinese intellectuals often alluded to Confucian morality in their insistence on China's civilizational superiority to Japan, what they understood as "Confucianism" was quite different than during the May Fourth Movement, as shown by Zhou's wartime efforts to recover pristine Confucianism that had not been subject to revisionist alterations. What these writers referred to as Confucianism was quite selective and often very vague, focusing on universal values such as benevolence and highlighting the transfer of this culture from China to Japan. The hierarchical relationships, which May Fourth iconoclasts blamed for perpetuating filial piety, the subordination of women, and the oppressive monarchical system, among other societal ills.<sup>65</sup> The crux of the matter, then, becomes whether the May Fourth rejection of Confucianism was really so total, or whether it was merely a convenient scapegoat for all that had gone wrong in society.

I would argue that anti-Confucianism during the May Fourth era was similar to anti-Manchuism in the early 20th century. Both movements were part of a larger effort to define "Chinese" national identity through scapegoating and rejecting what did not belong. Although anti-Manchu nationalism was more concerned with rejecting the "foreign," and anti-Confucianism with rejecting the "traditional," the two national movements did share some proponents among the pre-1911 revolutionaries. I believe that both anti-Manchu nationalism and anti-Confucian nationalism were fundamentally unstable, being rooted in a negative societal reaction rather than a positive construction of national identity. Thus, anti-Manchu nationalism

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<sup>65</sup> Zarrow, 137-140.

faded after the Qing Dynasty was overthrown, and anti-Confucianism also waxed and waned in subsequent years.<sup>66</sup> As Sinologist Peter Zarrow notes:

[The views of the New Culture iconoclasts] seemed to carry the day. Their views long dominated interpretations of Chinese history in both China and the West...[Yet] Confucianism never completely lacked defenders, and the possibility of a Confucian contribution to Chinese modernity has recently received a more respectful hearing. Furthermore, the iconoclasts may not have left Confucianism as far behind as they thought. Just as Marxism grew out of liberalism in the nineteenth century, so the radical Chinese critique of Confucianism owed some of its impulse and premises to elements of Confucianism, inheriting some of its traits: a sense of social responsibility; a disposition toward universality; the dialectic between morality and education...cultural self-criticism; and individual self-cultivation.<sup>67</sup>

I concur with Zarrow's assessment, and would add that this helps explain why Confucian rhetoric made such a comeback during Chinese wartime writings on Japan, particularly in light of its role in reimagining China as a "moral victor" rather than an "imperialist victim." Although Chinese nationalism vis-à-vis the West played by the rules of sovereignty and territoriality established under the Westphalian system, with countries like Japan, the transition from *tianxia* to nation-state diplomacy was not so straightforward. After all, the legacy of Confucianism was far from dead and still had an important role to play in Chinese nationalism. Confucian ethics had played a crucial role in China's dynastic development over the centuries and could not be so easily discarded from the Chinese psyche. Indeed, the rhetoric of Confucian morality, which had informed Chinese perceptions of Japan for so long, was easily resuscitated for wartime morale to remind readers that China was still the elder brother.

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<sup>66</sup> Although racial antagonism continued against the Manchus after the establishment of the Republic, as Peter Zarrow notes, "without a more thoroughly biological imaginary, anti-Manchuism could not become a foundational myth of the revolution. For all its limitations, the 1911 Revolution resolved the late Qing identity crisis. Nationhood having been at least preliminarily achieved, [racial] purification was no longer on the agenda." Zarrow, "Historical Trauma: Anti-Manchuism and Memories of Atrocity in Late Qing China," *History & Memory* 16, no. 2 (2004): 96.

<sup>67</sup> Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution*, 139-140.

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