

The Memory of an Assassin and Problems of Legitimacy in the Wang Jingwei Regime (1940–1945)

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IN LATE FEBRUARY 1942, the journal *Accord* (*Tongsheng* 同聲) published a collection of curious poems.¹ It was a monthly respected by traditionally educated intellectuals living in the occupied territories, as it was edited by the renowned scholar Long Yusheng 龍榆生 (1902–1966) and dedicated to the writing and research of classical-style Chinese literature. As Long was Wang Jingwei's confidant, it was sponsored by the Propaganda Department (Xuanchuan bu 宣傳部)

ABSTRACT: In early 1942, a poetry exchange about a painting on the ancient assassin Jing Ke took place among top collaborators at Nanjing. Chinese cultural memory of Jing Ke, long contested, shifted in the twentieth century, making him into a Republican and national hero, eventually symbolizing resistance against Japan. Thus, these poems, especially considering their Japanese readership, show that although cultural memory can be evoked as a legitimizing discourse to serve political needs, its plasticity gives it versatility. Wang's own iconography as assassin, central in constructing the legitimacy of his regime, was a floating symbol that assumed varying meanings in different contexts. It simultaneously justified collaboration, assuming that Japan's pan-Asianism would usher in a new unified Qin empire, and also resistance, assuming Wang Jingwei's perceived readiness to make a personal sacrifice to save the nation.

摘要：本文圍繞 1942 年初南京汪政權的菁英文人間的《易水送別圖》唱酬，通過荊軻歷史形象的變遷，探討文化記憶的可塑性如何使其在多種語境下獲得多重意義。汪精衛作為“當代荊軻”的刺客形象是其政治魅力的關鍵。它也是一個漂浮的符號，同時肯定抵抗與合作的合法性。

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: I thank Xiaofei Tian, Hans van de Ven, Susan Daruvala, Wen-hsin Yeh, Liu Wei-Chih 劉威志, Friederike Ousin, Melissa J. Brown, and three anonymous reviewers for their invaluable help and comments, which have improved the article in many ways. All errors are of course mine.

¹ All poems are found in *Tongsheng* 2.2 (1942): 139–49.

of the Reorganized National Government (RNG; 1940–1945), a client regime founded under the Japanese patronage less than a year earlier in Nanjing. The string of events began when Ren Yuandao 任援道 (1890–1980), Minister of the RNG Navy (Haijun buzhang 海軍部長; acting, 1940–1942), procured a painting, *Bidding Farewell at River Yi* (*Yi shui songbie tu* 易水送別圖), by the late Cantonese artist Gao Qifeng 高奇峰 (1889–1933). Ren asked for colophons in verse form from luminaries of the regime, including the regime's leader Wang Zhaoming 汪兆銘 (1883–1944), better known by his pen name Jingwei 精衛. These ten poems were inspired by each other and sometimes matched each other in rhyme. One month later, the same journal published an opera *Bidding Farewell at River Yi*, which integrated poems produced in this exchange into its libretto.² In April, *National Art* (*Guoyi* 國藝), another literary journal sponsored by the RNG, chimed in, republishing most of these poems.³

One message in this much-promoted poetic exchange was easy to decode. In this message, Wang Jingwei, China's chief collaborator, was compared to the ancient assassin Jing Ke 荊軻 (d. 227 BCE). The painting depicted a moment when he departs on a journey of no return to prevent Ying Zheng 嬴政 (259–210 BCE), the King of Qin (Qin wang 秦王), from uniting China. Contemporaneous readers were easily reminded that Wang rose to national fame in 1910 after his failed attempt on the life of Prince Regent Zaifeng 載灃 (1883–1951), father of China's last emperor. Jing Ke's assassination attempt at the dawn of the Chinese bureaucratic empire and Wang Jingwei's at its final light thus echoed across time. The analogy between them was made more explicit by another cycle of poetic exchange, published in October 1942, on a painting depicting the Yinding Bridge 銀錠橋 in Beijing, below which the youthful Wang and his coconspirators had buried the bomb in 1910.⁴ The resurgence of Wang Jingwei's iconography as an assassin and would-be martyr in 1942 is significant. Taken as a whole, the authors of both sets of the poems seem to hint at yet another comparison—Japan is likened to the Qin, for both were powers that threatened to conquer all of China by force.

² Long Yusheng [Zhongshan Yinqilang 鐘山隱七郎, pseud.], *Yishui songbie (lishi geju)* 易水送別 (歷史歌劇), in *Tongsheng* 2.3 (1942): 91–106.

³ All poems are found in *Guoyi* 4.1 (1942): 19–20.

⁴ All poems are found in *Tongsheng* 2.9 (1942): 98, 99, and 102.

The poetic exchanges delineate a vivid picture of the RNG elite's daily life at Nanjing. Unlike literary collaborators in occupied Shanghai, Beijing, or Manchuria, whose chosen genres of expression were novels and familiar essays, the Nanjing cultural scene was dominated by classical-style poets, who spoke to each other in a coded language referring to a repertoire of shared cultural memories.⁵ As Jan Assmann argues, cultural memory is the shared memory of the past through which an individual gains a sense of identity and can talk of "we"; it endows life "with a kind of dual time," creating the eternal presence of the past.⁶ Aleida Assmann further divides cultural memory into "the working reference memory" and "the archive and the store house of a society's cultural past."⁷ A classical-style poem's allusions, style, and form can all become carriers of cultural memory. By actively evoking cultural memory, the poets engaged in an exchange actualized the past, generating at the same time a sense of shared identity. Furthermore, as this identity was only revealed to those "insiders" of the group, the "mask" of poetic convention and refinement permitted them to speak more freely of what was unspeakable in prose. Scholars studying Chinese collaboration during the Second World War (WWII) have long been challenged by restricted access to RNG archives in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and by the scarcity of immediate accounts untarnished by hindsight bias.⁸ These poems thus constitute precious materials that offer a glimpse, via their ciphered dialogue, into the collaborators' predicament, sense of self, moral vision, fear of eternal condemnation, and possible political strategies.

These poems corroborate scholars' efforts to create a more nuanced

⁵ Edward M. Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking, 1937–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); and Norman Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Occupation* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

⁶ Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 3, 42, 58.

⁷ Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), p. 100.

⁸ Even this otherwise thorough opus shows this historiographic gap: Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).

narrative of Chinese collaboration. The institutionalized historiography in the PRC continues to denounce all collaborators (and sometimes accommodators) as traitors to the Han race (*hanjian* 漢奸).⁹ In the broader academic scene, however, scholars in recent years have attempted to judge collaboration as a political rather than a moral behavior. Their attempts echo studies on war-era France, where scholars like Bertram Gordon separate “collaborationists,” who collaborated with Nazi Germany on ideological grounds, from “collaborators,” who trafficked with Nazis solely for material gains or personal advancement.¹⁰ In the Chinese case, scholars tend to agree that collaborationists were rare, while most collaborators were opportunistic survivors.¹¹ Admittedly, however, there existed a vast middle ground between collaboration and collaborationism.¹² Jie Liu identifies the RNG as lying somewhere “between collaboration and resistance.”¹³ Timothy Brook proposes characterizing their ideological persuasion as “collaborationist nationalism”—not in the sense that they agreed with Japan’s militarist ideology, but rather that they proposed a collaborative albeit provisional arrangement with another nation in order to serve the higher interests of their own nation.¹⁴ The poems under examination, however, depict a moment when options were still on the table, and agents who were still to make history were caught ruminating about what to do and who they were. As lyric poetry speaks in a voice of immediacy and intimacy to the reader, it writes a chapter of history with human warmth, unearthing complicated motivations that mix ambition, opportunism, and vanity with valor, sacrifice, and dedication.

⁹ Almost all publications in the PRC to date carry the word *jian* 奸 or *wei* 偽 in the title; for instance, *Shenxun Wang wei hanjian bilu* 审讯汪伪汉奸笔录, 2nd ed., edited by Nanjing Shi dang’anguan 南京市档案馆, 2 vols. (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2004).

¹⁰ For example, Bertram M. Gordon, *Collaborationism in France during the Second World War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 18.

¹¹ Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, p. 9; Poshek Fu, *Passivity*, p. 110; Smith, *Resisting Manchukuo*, p. 5.

¹² David Barret, “Introduction: Occupied China and the Limits of Accommodation,” in *Chinese Collaboration with Japan, 1932–1945: The Limits of Accommodation*, ed. David Barrett and Larry Shyu (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 8, 17.

¹³ Jie Liu, “Wang Jingwei and the ‘Nanjing Nationalist Government’: Between Collaboration and Resistance,” trans. Konrad Lawson, in *Toward a History beyond Borders: Contentious Issues in Sino-Japanese Relations*, ed. Daqing Yang et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012), pp. 205–39.

¹⁴ Timothy Brook, “Collaborationist Nationalism in Occupied Wartime China,” in *Nation Work: Asian Elites and National Identities*, ed. Timothy Brook and Andre Schmidt (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 162.

For poets, authenticity is part of their theatricality. In contrast to other scholars who use Wang's poetry to understand his collaboration, I resist the temptation to read these poems as mere revelations.¹⁵ Poetry writing is a self-conscious, performative act. It punctuates the continuous flow of time with moments of contemplation. It assigns semantic order, metrical rhythm, and philosophical depth to the otherwise cacophonous experience of living. I contend that poems are active biographers of their authors' public lives, partaking in a constant and dynamic dialogue with a diachronic republic of letters.

For the collaborator-poets, this privileged community included their Japanese patrons too. The attention of their conquerors should have made the open publication of these poems, which likened Japan to the Qin and Wang Jingwei to Jing Ke, dangerous—except that it was not. Allusions are inherently ambivalent, open to multiple dimensions of exegesis. A reference to Jing Ke may emphasize dramatically different sides of his story. The rich repertoire of exegetical traditions can thus be selectively appropriated to serve various contemporaneous political purposes.

Wang's clique was appropriating Jing Ke's heroism to boost the moral profile of Wang Jingwei. Their poems reminded readers of Wang's revolutionary past and hinted at patriotic motivations for his collaboration—and, by extension, for theirs. As such, they sought to preemptively refute the institutionalized historical memory of future generations lest they view the RNG as a traitors' venture. Wang's personality cult, in this and other ways, was exploited as a means to compensate for his regime's deficiency in institutional legitimacy.¹⁶

The poetic exchange on the painting *Bidding Farewell at River Yi* was a small but highly complex instance of lyricized dialogues. It involved a plethora of actors: the painting (as well as its painter and the colophons it already bore), its owner and promoter, the collaborator-poets, the poems' publication, the venues of publication, the potential readers

¹⁵ This otherwise excellent analysis of these poems betrays the same tendency: Liu Wei-Chih [Liu Weizhi] 劉威志, "Liang Wang heping yundong xia de fushi yanzhì" 梁汪和平運動下的賦詩言志 (PhD diss., National Tsing Hua University [Taiwan], 2017), pp. 193–232. Cf. Yu Ying-shih [Yu Yingshi 余英時], first preface (*xu* 序) to Wang Jingwei, *Shuangzhao-lou shici gao* 雙照樓詩詞彙, ed. Wang Mengchuan 汪夢川 (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxiangongsi, 2012), pp. 6–31; Yeh Chia-ying [Ye Jiaying] 葉嘉瑩, second preface (*xu*) to Wang Jingwei, *Shuangzhao-lou shici gao*, p. 31.

¹⁶ Jeremy E. Taylor, "Republican Personality Cults in Wartime China: Contradictions and Collaboration," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57.3 (2015): 665–93.

(Chinese and Japanese alike). Last but not least in adding to the complexity are the cultural memories evoked in this exchange. Particularly multivalent is the memory of Jing Ke and his association with Wang Zhaoming's own mythologized biography, an association embodied by the pen name Jingwei—namesake of a mythical bird that carried pebbles in its bleeding beak to fill up a soaring ocean to avenge its wrongs.¹⁷ This story illustrates the awkward symbiosis between these Chinese collaborators and their Japanese patrons, in an age when national sovereignty was increasingly perceived as the normative foundation of a state's authority and legitimacy. As for poetic justice, nothing befitted the oxymoronic nature of RNG's "collaborationist nationalism" more than a regicidal assassin serving as its head of state. In the end, Wang Jingwei's iconography as an assassin is revealed to be a rich and ambivalent floating symbol, assuming various meanings in different contexts. It simultaneously justified collaboration, in the sense that Japan's pan-Asianism would usher in a new unified Qin Empire, and resistance, in the form of Wang Jingwei's perceived readiness to make a personal sacrifice to save the nation. It further offered a tantalizing opportunity for readers to imagine an unfulfilled but ultimately unknowable possibility of what Wang might do, when the proverbial map would be unfolded to its end. It was a story of multiple layers of remembrance, and through remembering the evoked past continued to transform.

Jing Ke: An Ambivalent Hero

The story of Jing Ke, immortalized by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BCE), is one of tension, suspense, and ambiguity.¹⁸ The basic plot is familiar to all: the Qin army threatens to conquer the northern state of Yan 燕, whose crown prince, Dan 丹, is looking for an assassin to kill the King of Qin. Tian Guang 田光 recommends Jing Ke, a roaming warrior, and then commits suicide to safeguard the secret. The defecting Qin general Fan Wuqi 樊於期 donates his head as a token to win the king's trust. The plan is to have the assassin unfold a map of Yan's

¹⁷ Yuan Ke 袁珂, *Shanhaijing jiaozhu* 山海經校注, 18 *juan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), j. 3, p. 92.

¹⁸ Sima Qian, "Cike liezhuan di-ershiliu" 刺客列傳第二十六, in *Shiji* 史記, ed. Pei Yin 裴駟, Sima Zhen 司馬貞, and Zhang Shoujie 張守節, 130 *juan* in 10 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), v. 8, j. 86, pp. 2526–38.

fertile regions in front of the king; a poisoned dagger is hidden at the end of the scroll. The assassination fails. Jing Ke and his cowardly companion Qin Wuyang 秦舞陽 are both executed. The Qin hastens its conquest of Yan, which falls in five years. A year later (221 BCE), China is united.

The River Yi scene marks the emotional climax in the account, where Dan and his close coterie of retainers, all dressed in white, dispatch the assassins. The musician Gao Jianli 高漸離 plays his *zhu* 筑 lute, and Jing Ke sings a song of great pathos, later known as “The Song of River Yi” (“Yishui ge” 易水歌):

風蕭蕭兮易水寒	The wuthering wind blows, ho, the River Yi is cold!
壯士一去兮不復還	The heroes are gone, ho, and will never return! ¹⁹

Despite the moving simplicity of the story, ambivalence lurks everywhere. Was Jing Ke the right man for the job? A better swordsman might not have failed. Did he delay the mission by pretending to wait for a nonexistent assistant? Was the plan a good one? And what was Jing Ke’s motivation in accepting the task? As he was not a native of Yan, it could not be for love of the homeland. Jing Ke’s fealty to Dan, however, seems transactional. Lastly, should Jing Ke have even tried to prevent the Qin unification? Since Ying Zheng later became the First Emperor (Qin shi huangdi 秦始皇帝, r. 221–210 BCE), should Jing Ke be considered a traitor, challenging the political orthodoxy (*zhengtong* 正統) established through Heaven’s mandate (*tianming* 天命)?

In the centuries that followed, Jing Ke’s story continued to inspire powerful emotional responses from poets and scholars. His sacrifice for Prince Dan and his regicidal attempt came to represent the polarity of an individual’s relation to political authority. From the Six Dynasties (222–589 CE) up to the high Tang (712–755), interpretations focused on the generosity of the patronage and the loyalty of the reciprocation. Tao Qian 陶潛 (352?–427?), for instance, describes Jing Ke’s motivation as “dying for the one who truly knows me” (*si zhiji* 死知己).²⁰

¹⁹ The song was likely interpolated into the *Shiji* text much later; Zhang Haiming 张海明, “Sima Qian zuo ‘Yishui ge’ xianyi” 司马迁作《易水歌》献疑, *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 4 (2013): 43–52.

²⁰ Tao Qian, “Yong Jing Ke” 詠荆軻, in *Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集, ed. Lu Qinli 逯欽立, 7 *juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), j. 4, p. 131.

From mid-Tang (618–907) through the Northern Song (960–1127), attitudes became more critical. Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), for instance, called Jing Ke “brave and stupid” (*yong qie yu* 勇且愚), his plan shortsighted, his procrastination disingenuous, his strike hobbled, and the consequences horrible.²¹ During the Southern Song (1127–1279), the loss of the northern territories lent Jing Ke’s story a new sense of urgency. If Jing Ke’s striving had been in vain, his spirit was precious—after all, who would be the Song-era Jing Ke, willing to take a country’s fate into his hands? The criticism of previous centuries suddenly felt frivolous, as only those living in desperate times understood desperate measures.²² This sentiment anticipated the nationalistic interpretations of Jing Ke’s story during China’s mid-twentieth-century war against Japan.

Under the unified Yuan, Ming, and Qing empires, few poets or scholars commended Jing Ke. As imperial control weakened, however, Jing Ke suddenly reentered late Qing discourse with new relevance as a democratic hero revolting against tyranny. Even Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) remarked that Chinese intellectuals’ spirit, long worn in pedantic philology, could borrow from Jing Ke a fresh dose of militarism to rejuvenate itself.²³ More radical admirers saw in Jing Ke a role model for Republican martyrs.²⁴ His fealty to Prince Dan was now refashioned as love of the people, his assassination attempt as an uprising against autocracy. His spirit, it was argued, inspired later rebels to overthrow the Qin rule, so his sacrifice was not in vain but rather a prelude to a greater revolution.

The young Wang Jingwei, a rising star in the Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmenghui 同盟會), was inspired by this general atmosphere to venture into the alien metropolis of Beijing in November 1909. His attempt on the prince regent’s life became one legend in an “era of assass-

²¹ Liu Zongyuan, “Yong Jing Ke” 詠荊軻, in *Liu Zongyuan ji* 柳宗元集, 45 *juan* in 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), v. 4, j. 43, p. 1259.

²² See, for instance, Lu You 陸遊, “Bingwu shiyue shisan yemeng guo yi dazhong [...]” 丙午十月十三夜夢過一大冢 [...], in *Jiannan shigao jiaozhu* 劍南詩稿校注, ed. Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯, 84 *juan* in 8 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), v. 3, j. 18, p. 1410; Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Chuci houyu* 楚辭後語, 6 *juan*, in vol. 19 of *Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書, ed. Zhu Jieren 朱傑人, Yan Zuozhi 嚴佐之, and Liu Yongxiang 劉永翔 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), j. 1, p. 234.

²³ Liang Qichao, “Zhongguo zhi wushidao” 中國之武士道 (1904), in *Liang Qichao quanji* 梁啟超全集, 21 *juan* in 10 vols. (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), v. 3, j. 5, p. 1415.

²⁴ See, for instance, Gao Xu 高旭, “Yong Jing Ke bu Tao Jingjie zuoyun” 詠荊軻步陶靖節作韻, *Fubao* 復報 7 (1906): 27–28.

sination" (*ansha shidai* 暗殺時代)—a term made famous by the testament of Wu Yue 吳樾 (1878–1905) and published in the *People's Journal* (*Minbao* 民報).²⁵ Wu killed himself in a suicide-bombing attack at a crowded train station, where a group of high Qing officials were sending off five ministers to study modern political institutions abroad. In the rising temperature of that parlous time, assassination was ardently plotted by men and women itching to accelerate the country's course of incremental change. Intellectuals of no less stature than Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940) and Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) joined one terrorist cell or another. More than fifty assassinations attempts occurred during the last decade of the Qing dynasty, and such assassins as the martyr Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875–1907) were celebrated across progressive newspapers.²⁶ Wu Yue reasoned that there were two ways to carry out the anti-Manchu movement—namely, assassination and revolution.²⁷ The former could be accomplished individually, the latter only collectively. He pronounced assassination a more urgent task, since only a malicious cycle of terror and vengeance could eventually engulf enough people into the vortex of revolution. Wu Yue hoped that his own death would stimulate others into action, just as the Russian nihilists with their red terror inspired incessant waves of uprisings against the czarist autocracy.

The young assassins were idealists and intellectuals. They were inspired by a motley of international, mostly leftist, ideologies, including nationalism, republicanism, communism, and anarchism. They were also inspired by the vein of moral philosophy in idealistic Confucianism that glorifies the world-changing effects of an individual's cultivation and endeavors. Anarchism, in particular, was popular among the revolutionaries.²⁸ Edward Krebs argues,

Anarchism held great appeal for Chinese intellectuals because it offered a scientific basis for a moral system that emphasized well-being for all members of society. Furthermore, anarchism's attack on all forms of

²⁵ Wu Yue, "Wu Yue yishu" 吳樾遺書, *Minbao* 民報, supplement (*zengkan* 增刊) (1907): S7–31.

²⁶ Huang Tao 黃滔, "Yuansha: Qingmo gemingpai ansa yanjiu" 原杀: 清末革命派暗杀研究 (master's thesis, Huadong shifan daxue 华东师范大学, 2013); Luo Haoxing 羅皓星, "1900 niandai zhongguo de zhengzhi ansa ji qi shehui xiaoying" 1900 年代中國的政治暗殺及其社會效應, *Zhengda shicui* 政大史粹 28 (2015): 153–99.

²⁷ Wu Yue, "Wu Yue yishu."

²⁸ Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 21–30.

authority entered into the thinking of Chinese activists at a point of growing disillusionment with authority.²⁹

Moreover, China's history of noble assassination helped the assassins get positive press.³⁰ Wang Jingwei's romantic streak drew him naturally to anarchism, a persuasion particularly pronounced in the early half of his life.³¹

None of the assassins attempted to take the emperor's life, but it was largely a matter of practicality. Late Qing emperors were recluses in guarded palaces who seldom risked exposure. In that era, psychological taboos against regicide no longer existed. The assassinations of Alexander II of Russia (March 31, 1881), Umberto I of Italy (June 27, 1900), and Alexander I of Serbia (June 11, 1903) were broadly relished across progressive newspapers and journals. For example, a 1908 article published in the *People's Journal* (ostensibly a translation of an unspecified Western newspaper article) even declared the time as "an era of regicide."³² The article argues that royal authority was once seen as sacred and emperors viewed as "sons of Heaven" but that Darwin's theory of evolution proves human beings are merely another naked animal, lacking divinity. Therefore, all men are born equal, and regicide should no longer be a crime against Heaven. Instead, the article warns all rulers that "a big flood is coming"—the "flood" of global revolution. In such a perspective, Chinese domestic assassins were active participants in a worldwide movement and pioneers of Chinese modernity, not common criminals. Ministers and princes became targets—not because of their individual offenses, but rather as surrogates for imperial power.

The fresh interpretation of Jing Ke as a hero of republicanism is reflected in Wang Jingwei's early poems. After the 1910 plot failed, Wang lingered in Beijing for another half a month and was eventually caught. His procrastination appears to have been deliberate: he sought the next best outcome—martyrdom and publicity for his cause. How-

²⁹ Edward S. Krebs, *Shifu, Soul of Chinese Anarchism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998), pp. 24–25.

³⁰ Krebs, *Shifu*, p. 40.

³¹ Zhiyi Yang, "A Humanist in Wartime France: Wang Jingwei during the First World War," *Poetica* 49.1–2 (2019): 163–92.

³² Jishou 无首, trans., "Diwang ansha zhi shidai" 帝王暗殺之時代, *Minbao* 21 (1908): 80–85. I have yet to identify the original text.

ever, his lengthy confession (*gongci* 供詞), which made an eloquent case for the nationalists, moved Prince Su Shanqi 肅親王善耆 (1866–1922) to reduce his execution sentence to life imprisonment. Wang wrote a number of poems in prison. In one, he listens to the wind on an autumn night and contemplates, “the wuthering wind blowing on River Yi today is just like yesterday” 風蕭易水今如昨.³³ In another lengthier poem, titled “Expressing My Thoughts” (“Shuhuai” 述懷), he recounts his life and dedication, relating the assassination attempt in the following excerpt:

哀哉眾生病	Alas—the multitude of sentient beings suffer such illness!
欲救無良藥	To save them, I have no good medicine.
歌哭亦徒爾	I sing, I weep—but all in vain!
搔爬苦不著	I scratch at the skin but cannot touch the root of suffering.
針砭不見血	Even acupuncture brings no drop of blood to the needle;
痿痺何由作	As if paralyzed, our nation will not rise.
驅車易水傍	I drive a chariot to the River Yi—
嗚咽聲如昨	The sobbing waters sound just like yesterday.
漸離不可見	But Jianli is nowhere to be found—
燕市成荒蕪	The market of Yan has turned into a barren expansion. ³⁴

Through repeated references to Jing Ke’s “Song of River Yi,” Wang appropriates Jing Ke as his precursor in deed, spirit, and literature. Wang sees his circumstances as even harsher: the market of Yan, where Jing Ke enjoyed the company of like-minded men, is now deserted. This image alludes to the numerous deaths of Wang’s comrades in uprisings and clampdowns. As a modern Jing Ke, Wang is driven not by fealty but solely by concern for the suffering masses. Without better medicine, he volunteers his own life, but he notably leaves out the role of Prince Dan in the story, making Jing Ke’s action entirely voluntary.

Japan’s hastening steps toward invasion fueled the transformation of Jing Ke into a Chinese “national hero” (*minzu yingxiong* 民族英雄),

³³ Wang Jingwei, “Qiuye” 秋夜, in *Shuangzhaolou shici gao*, p. 15.

³⁴ Wang Jingwei, “Shuhuai,” in *Shuangzhaolou shici gao*, pp. 35–36.

though the meaning of “nation” often remained undefined.³⁵ After the Mukden Incident of September 18, 1931, an outburst of references to Jing Ke appeared in journals and newspapers. His valiance and spirit, called the “soul of the nation” (*minzu hun* 民族魂), were seen as China’s last hope against industrialized Japan’s military clout.³⁶ In addition to poetry and prose versions, the story was performed on stage and in film. New librettos for traditional opera music as well as newly composed stage scripts elaborated the story. Take, for instance, Gu Yuxiu’s 顧毓琇 (1902–2002) four-act stage play *Jing Ke*, first completed in December 1924 in Cambridge, England, and rewritten in 1939.³⁷ The 1924 version already establishes the analogy between the state of Yan and twentieth-century China. In the 1939 version, first published in 1940 in the wartime capital Chongqing, militant patriotism assumed even greater urgency. Gao Jianli is transformed into a military strategist. He argues that Yan can only win through a protracted war and that its future lies in united resistance and international alliance.³⁸ His opinion reflects the Guomindang 國民黨 (GMD, Nationalist party) official strategy of resistance.³⁹ The play was popular in the military’s rear area of operations. In addition to the stage version, an opera version was published in January 1940 and premiered in March 1941.⁴⁰

Through repeated rewriting, *Jing Ke* finally morphed into a national martyr and a herald of united resistance. Given this context, it is hard to imagine that any reference to *Jing Ke* in WWII-era China could possibly be interpreted as anything other than resistance to Japan.⁴¹

³⁵ Ding Hongxun 丁鴻勳, “Zhongyi renxia de dianxing renwu: Jing Ke” 重義任俠的典型人物——荊軻, *Xiahun* 俠魂 3.3 (1936): 157.

³⁶ Caonong 漕農, “Minzu hun: Jing Ke” 民族魂: 荊軻, *Guoxun* 國訊 85 (1935): 462.

³⁷ Gu Yuxiu, *Jing Ke* (1924), in *Dajiang jikan* 大江季刊 1.1 (1925): 103, 109; Gu Yuxiu, *Jing Ke* (1939) (1940; rpt. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1946).

³⁸ Gu Yuxiu, *Jing Ke* (1946 rpt.), pp. 2–3, 13–14.

³⁹ Yang Tianshi 楊天石, *Zhaoxun zhenshi de Jiang Jieshi: Jiang Jieshi riji jiedu* 找尋真實的蔣介石: 蔣介石日記解讀, 3 vols. (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2008–2014), v. 2, pp. 121–38.

⁴⁰ Gu Yuxiu and Liang Shih-chiu [Liang Shiqiu] 梁實秋 (libretto), *Jing Ke chaqu* 荊軻插曲, music by Ying Shangneng 應尚能 (Chongqing: Yongkui yuepu kanyinshe 咏葵樂譜刊印社, 1940); Microform no. J642.41, Republic of China Documents Collection 馆藏中文资源 / 民国文献, National Library of China 中国国家图书馆, Beijing. For its premiere, see “Guoli yinyue xueyuan xiayue shouci yanzou *Jing Ke chaqu*” 國立音樂學院下月首次演奏荊軻插曲, *Yishibao* 益世報 (Chongqing), February 24, 1941.

⁴¹ The *Qin*, of course, is often used as a synonym for tyranny. In his 1930s classical-style verses, Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936) used the *Qin* to refer to Chiang Kai-shek [Jiang Jieshi] 蔣介石 (1887–1975) or the GMD regime under Chiang; Jon Eugene von Kowallis,

Jing Ke's story shows the plasticity of cultural memory. Though some basic elements of the story remain unchanged in the retelling, its significance keeps adapting to the framework where the cultural memory is evoked. The innate ambivalence of the original story becomes its strength in preserving its canonicity, as its "antithetical values" accommodate sometimes dramatically different interpretations.⁴² As it turns out, the iconography of Wang Jingwei as a new Jing Ke contains similar contradictions.

Wang Jingwei as the New Jing Ke

Throughout Wang Jingwei's political career, his public image of moral audacity and altruistic dedication, embodied by his iconography as an assassin, was the essence of his appeal and legitimized his claim to power, despite his lack of financial or military means. The painting *Bidding Farewell at River Yi* now appears lost. The Cantonese artist Gao Weng 高嶽 (known by his style name Gao Qifeng) was a close friend of Wang Jingwei. After the war, Ren Yuandao recollected that, around 1919–1920, Hu Hanmin 胡漢民 (1879–1936) wrote a quatrain for Wang as a colophon to a painting "on men in white robes and hats at River Yi."⁴³ Judging from Ren's description, I think it must have been the same painting. Ren's recollection helps to date the painting and suggests that it was originally composed precisely to commemorate Wang's heroism as a founding act of the Republic, at a time when Wang ended his *Lehrjahre* (Deu., apprenticeship) in Europe to rejoin his comrades in arms and acted, together with Hu Hanmin, as Sun Yat-sen's (Sun Zhongshan 孫中山; 1866–1925) most trusted lieutenant.⁴⁴

Such an origin would explain why, years later in 1942, when Wang was presented with the painting, he was moved to tears. He must have recognized his younger self and the world's expectations of him. Ren Yuandao's agency in presenting the painting appears significant. After

The Lyrical Lu Xun (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), pp. 156–61. However, at least in the poetry concerning Jing Ke during the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), the Qin was generally used as a code name for Japan.

⁴² I borrow this phrase from Hazard Adams, "Canons: Literary Criteria/Power Criteria," *Critical Inquiry* 14.4 (1988): 748–64.

⁴³ Ren Yuandao [Ren You'an 任友安, pseud.], *Zhegu yijiu ci* 鷓鴣憶舊詞 (Hong Kong: Tianwentai chubanshe, 1990), pp. 29–30.

⁴⁴ Zhiyi Yang, "A Humanist in Wartime France."

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941), Ren began to contact Chongqing and work secretly under its directives, probably as a bet-hedging strategy.⁴⁵ In the same winter of 1941–1942, he asked Long Yusheng and Li Xuanti 李宣倜 (1888–1961) to compose two lyric songs.⁴⁶ Then Ren showed Wang Jingwei the painting together with the new colophons. Given the painting's emotional value to Wang, this gift must have been a carefully deliberated act—perhaps one of persuasion, instigating Wang to be Jing Ke again.

Long's and Li's poems reveal their own understandings of Wang's collaboration and his iconography.

龍榆生，水龍吟·題高奇峰畫易水送別圖

Long Yusheng, "A Dragon Sings in Water:

On Gao Qifeng's Painting *Bidding Farewell at River Yi*"

所期不與偕來	My expected companion has not come;
雪衣相送胡爲者	what for, bidding farewell in robes white like snow?
高歌擊筑	I sing a song of pathos to a lute tune;
寒波酸淚	into the cold billowing waves, some grieving tears
一時俱下	stream down all at once.
血冷樊頭	The blood on Fan Wuqi's head is getting cold:
忍還留戀	how can I further delay, over the charm of
名姬駿馬	beautiful women and fine steeds?
問誰深知我	I ask, Who knows me deeply?
時相迫促	Time presses.
恩和怨	What is left, of all the kindness and resentment,
餘悲咤	are tragic cries of battle.
孤注早拚一擲	I have long determined to throw the single die,
賭興亡	to bet on the rise or fall,
批鱗寧怕	risking the dragon's wrath. ⁴⁷
秦貪易與	Qin with its greed has a weakness;

⁴⁵ Liu Wei-Chih, "Liang Wang," p. 231.

⁴⁶ Long was an RNG legislator at the time, and Li was head of the RNG Bureau of Engraving and Printing (Yinzhu ju 印鑄局).

⁴⁷ In *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, the senior statesman Ju Wu 鞠武 chides Prince Dan's desire to avenge Qin's humiliation as "stroking [the dragon's] reverse scales" 批其逆鱗; Zhu Zugeng 諸祖耿, *Zhanguo ce jizhu huikao* 戰國策集註匯考, 33 juan in 3 vols. (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2008), v. 3, j. 31, p. 1645. Allegedly, a dragon can be meek, but because it has reversely aligned scales below its neck, anyone who strokes these scales is exposed to the dragon's wrath.

燕讎可復	the injustice against Yan may be avenged—
徑騰吾駕	I take my swift departure.
日瘦風悽	The skinny sun, the desolate wind,
草枯沙白	upon withered grassland and white sands,
飄然曠野	my shadow flaps through vast plains.
漸酒醒人遠	Slowly, the effect of alcohol fades; the persons
	are gone.
暗祈芳劍	I say a wordless prayer to my fragrant sword,
把神威借	to borrow its divine power. ⁴⁸

Long's lyric poem describes a solitary hero: one man, one chance, one sword. Yet with bravery and determination, he takes matters like the "rise or fall" of states into his own hands. The poem ends in suspense: a private moment when the hero prays to his sword, "fragrant" from ancient blood, to "borrow" its divine power. In Chinese literature and folklore, fine swords are magical objects with their own lives and destinies: they require human blood as a finishing touch; when hung in idleness on the wall they sing, asking for attention or begging to kill; and they transform into dragons.⁴⁹ Jing Ke's prayer externalizes the stronger part of his self into the image of a sharp sword that is blood-thirsty by nature. By virtue of its "divine power," his success is probable. Of course, the fact that readers know how the story will unfold increases the sense of tragedy when the audience, in full knowledge of the future, watches helplessly as the hero gallops toward his fate. In Long Yusheng's opera libretto *Bidding Farewell at River Yi*, this lyric poem is used verbatim as Jing Ke's aria before his departure for Qin.⁵⁰

Li Xuanti's song is written to the tune of "The River Runs Red" ("Manjiang hong" 滿江紅), a tune often associated with patriotism because of a poem attributed to the anti-Jurchen hero Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103–1142). Li's poem reads:

⁴⁸ Long Yusheng, "Shuilongyin, Ti Gao Qifeng hua *Yishui songbie tu*" 水龍吟·題高奇峰畫易水送別圖, *Tongsheng* 2.2 (1942): 148–49. The text is anthologized in a slightly revised form in Long Yusheng, *Long Yusheng cixue lunwen ji* 龍榆生詞學論文集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997), pp. 557–58.

⁴⁹ For the earliest record of using human sacrifice as the finishing touch to make swords, see Zhao Ye 趙曄, *Wuyue chunqiu* 吳越春秋, ed. Xu Tianhu 徐天祐, 6 *juan*, in vol. 203 of *Yingyin Chizaotang siku quanshu huiyao* 景印摛藻堂四庫全書薈要 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1988), j. 2, pp. 3–4. On an idled sword singing like a dragon, see, for example, Li Bai 李白, "Dulupian" 獨漉篇, in *Li Taibai quanji* 李太白全集, 36 *juan* in 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), v. 1, j. 4, pp. 221–22.

⁵⁰ Long Yusheng, *Yishui songbie* (*lishi geju*), pp. 99–100.

李宣侗，滿江紅·題易水送別圖
 Li Xuanti, "The River Runs Red: On the Painting
Bidding Farewell at River Yi"

煮酒談天	Those who chat about history over a hot cup of wine,
且休笑	please do not laugh at
荊卿謀拙	Master Jing's awkward plan!
燕趙勢虎蹊委肉	Like pieces of meat abandoned on a tiger's path, ⁵¹
幾何能輟	Yan's and Zhao's nightmare had no end.
功就定誇曹沫勇	If he succeeded, his courage would be praised like Cao Mo's;
身亡未讓專諸烈	If he died, his heroism would still be no less than Zhuan Zhu's.
算當時	Let me guess—back then,
百計費沉吟	he pondered over hundreds of plans
方投玦	before throwing in the precious jade [of his life].
一諾感	His single promise was moved by
田光節	Tian Guang's integrity;
片語濺	Upon a single word there splashed
於期血	Fan Wuqi's blood.
豈縱橫游俠	Is it not a case of those roaming warriors
恩酬冤雪	who must see debt paid and injustice avenged?
短劍單車汾水遠	Equipped with a short dagger, riding a lone chariot, he left the Fen River far behind;
高歌哀筑秦宮歇	A song of pathos from a harrowing lute, stilled the palace of Qin.
甚丹青	What marvelous art!
千載卷圖看	After thousands of years, when this painting is rolled out,
酸風咽	sorrowful wind still chokes in grief. ⁵²

The first stanza of the poem protests the harsh judgments that poets since the mid-Tang (except during the Song) had meted out to Jing Ke.

⁵¹ Ju Wu advised Prince Dan against giving asylum to Fan Wuqi, as it would certainly attract the Qin tiger's attention; Sima Qian, "Cike liezhuan di-ershiliu," in *Shiji*, v. 8, j. 86, p. 2529.

⁵² Li Xuanti, "Manjianghong: Ti Yishui songbie tu," *Tongsheng* 2.2 (1942): 147–8; republished in *Guoyi* 4.1 (1942): 19.

Li Xuanti argues that states, such as Yan, did not have good options. Cao Mo and Zhuan Zhu were two other assassins glorified by Sima Qian. Cao was a general of Lu 魯 who held Duke Huan of Qi (Qi Huan gong 齊桓公, d. 643 BCE) as hostage to force him to return the occupied territories, and Zhuan Zhu sacrificed himself to kill King Liao of Wu (Wuwang Liao 吳王僚; d. 515 BCE) on behalf of a rival prince.⁵³ Though for Jing Ke neither scenario was realized, Li argues, poor planning did not cause the failures.

The comparisons are not entirely Li's own. The aforementioned colophon by Hu Hanmin, written on the painting, reads:

功就不誇曹沫勇 If you succeed, your courage will overshadow
 that of Cao Mo;
身亡未讓專諸烈 If you die, your heroism will still be no less than
 Zhuan Zhu's.
知君百計費沉吟 I know that you pondered over hundreds of plans;
滿座衣冠真似雪 The robes and hats of all present are indeed like
 snow.⁵⁴

Three lines from Hu's quatrain are reworked by Li Xuanti into his lyric song. Their intertextuality suggests that they were originally written for, and possibly on, the same painting. However, unlike Li Xuanti who uses the third-person pronoun throughout, Hu Hanmin's poem addresses the protagonist directly with a sense of intimacy. Hu's last line is borrowed from a lyric song by Xin Qiji 辛棄疾 (1140–1207):

易水蕭蕭西風冷 Upon the Yi River, the wuthering west wind
 chills;
滿座衣冠似雪 all present, their robes and hats like snow.⁵⁵

The Southern Song poet Xin Qiji was renowned for his patriotic resolution to recover the northern territories under the Jurchen occupation. Though the precise circumstances of his composition were unclear, his use of the Jing Ke allusion reflects his admiration for the Warring States assassin.

⁵³ Sima Qian, "Cike liezhuan di-ershiliu," in *Shiji*, v. 8, j. 86, pp. 2515–21.

⁵⁴ Hu Hanmin's colophon, quoted in Ren Yuandao, *Zhegu yijiu ci*, p. 30.

⁵⁵ Xin Qiji, "He xinlang: Bie Maojia shierdi" 賀新郎·別茂嘉十二弟, in *Jiaxuanci bian-nian jianzhu* 稼軒詞編年箋注, ed. Deng Guangming 鄧廣銘, 6 *juan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), j. 4, pp. 526–27.

Hu and Wang Jingwei were comrades in the anti-Manchu nationalist revolution. Before Wang headed toward Beijing to carry out the 1910 assassination plan, he sent an epistle to Hu. In it, he compares himself to “firewood” (*xin* 薪) that must be burned to cook rice and suggests that Hu should be the “pot” (*fu* 釜) that perseveres to bring warm food to the mouths of the people.⁵⁶ Wang acknowledges that martyrdom is easy and perseverance is hard; he entrusts the harder task to his friend. We may deduce that Hu envisions himself among the white-robed.

Li Xuanti’s poem thus refers to both Xin’s and Hu’s poems, which evoke the cultural memory of Jing Ke to valorize rebellion against foreign occupation. The implications were not lost on Wang Jingwei, though his sentiments were decidedly different, as the lengthy title of his set of two poems states:

汪精衛，豁齋出示易水送別圖，中有予舊日題字，並有榆生釋勘兩詞家新作。把覽之餘，萬感交集，率題長句二首

Wang Jingwei, “Huo’an Presents Me with the Painting *Bidding Farewell at River Yi*, Which Still Bears My Old Colophon, as well as Two New Compositions by Yusheng and Shikan. While Viewing and Caressing [the Painting], Myriad Emotions Swept over Me, So I Extemporized Two Long Poems”

一首 First Poem

酒市酣歌共慨慷	Singing a drunken song in the wine market, we shared impassioned feelings,
况茲揮手上河梁	Not to mention the moment when we bid farewell on a bridge over the river, each toward a different destiny.
懷才蓋聶身偏隱	But Ge Nie, with his martial talent, hides in reclusion;
授命於期目尚張	The eyes of Wuqi, who donated his life, remain wide open.
落落死生原一瞬	With grace shall one cross the gap between life and death;
悠悠成敗亦何常	Success and failure cannot be determined by constant factors.

⁵⁶ Wang Jingwei, “Yu Hanmin shu” 與漢民書, in *Wang Jingwei ji* 汪精衛集, 4 juan (1930; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1992), j. 4, p. 82.

漸離筑繼荊卿劍 Jianli's lute soon followed Master Jing's sword;
博浪椎興人未亡 And Zhang Liang's iron hammer proved that he
 never died.

二首 Second Poem

少壯今成兩鬢霜 Once young and strong, now both temples are
 covered by frost;
畫圖重對益徬徨 Facing this painting again increases my sense of
 disorientation.
生慚鄭國延韓命 Alive, I feel ashamed for Zheng Guo,
 prolonging Han's bare survival;
死羨汪錡作魯殤 In death, I shall envy Wang Qi, recognized as
 Lu's martyr.
有限山河供墮甑 How many mountains and rivers are there to
 devolve into potsherds?
無多涕淚泣亡羊 No more tears shall be shed to cry over a lost
 goat.
相期更聚神州鐵 Let us hope to gather all the irons in our Divine
 Land,
鑄出金城萬里長 To cast a Great Wall of metal, ten thousand
 miles long!⁵⁷

Wang seldom wrote exchange poems matching others' compositions in rhyme, but these poems did respond to Li's and Long's, forming a dialogue. The first poem begins with a reference to Jing Ke's joyous society in the market of Yan. The second line suggests, however, that these old friends from the days of the Nationalist revolution have parted ways with him. Instead of the proverbial River Yi, the site of their farewell is the "bridge over the river." This phrase alludes to "Han Old Poem," which begins with the line "Holding hands, we walked to the bridge over the river" 攜手上河梁; it is one of three poems anthologized in *Selections of Fine Literature* (*Wenxuan* 文選) as sent from Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BCE) to Su Wu 蘇武 (140–60 BCE).⁵⁸ Both were Han

⁵⁷ Wang Jingwei, "Huo'an chushi *Yishui songbie tu*, zhong you yu jiuri tizi, bing you Yusheng Shikan liang cijia xinzuo. Balan zhiyu, wangan jiaoji, shuai ti changju ershou," *Tongsheng* 2.2 (1942): 139–40; republished in *Guoyi* 4.1 (1942): 19. For a contemporary edition, see Wang Jingwei, *Shuangzhaolou shici gao*, p. 295.

⁵⁸ See poem no. 3 of "Li Shaoqing yu Su Wu shi sanshou" 李少卿與蘇武詩三首, in

generals detained by the Xiongnu. Su Wu persevered and ultimately returned to Han as a hero. In contrast, after his entire family was executed by the emperor and he was denounced as a traitor for his actions, Li Ling defected to the Xiongnu. Symbolically, the “bridge” is a liminal space between home and alien territories, life and death, as well as glory and condemnation.

In the second couplet, Wang justifies his choice to cross the bridge. He argues that better men, such as Ge Nie, a great swordsman in *Shiji*'s original story, stayed in lofty detachment. The furious eyes on Fan Wuqi's severed head stand for expectations from comrades who had already died for Wang's cause. In addition to those who perished in uprisings before and after the Republic's founding, Wang's personal secretary and protégé Zeng Zhongming 曾仲鳴 (1896–1939) was assassinated in Hanoi on March 21, 1939, becoming the Fan Wuqi of Wang's Peace movement (Heping yundong 和平運動). The traumatic memory of Zeng's death was a dominant theme in Wang's poetry prior to the foundation of the RNG. Every year on the anniversary of Zeng's death, the RNG held memorial services to commemorate his “martyrdom.” As late as 1943, Wang still vowed to “put the original mountains and rivers into order; / never betray my old friends' expectations” 收拾舊山河, 勿負故人心.⁵⁹ This promise was a strong psychological factor to keep him going.

The third couplet philosophizes on the principle of impermanence. Wang routinely staked his moral reputation on the claim that he was not afraid of death. In the fifth line, Wang restates his equanimity toward this ultimate fear in life; in the sixth line, he further wonders about whether an action should be judged by its outcome. The implication is that the true morality of an action lies in its intention, not its result, an argument that appears to preemptively refute the future historian's verdict of him. Historians have a famous hindsight bias. The Qing scholar Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797) points out that historians like Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53–18 BCE) and Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086)

Wenxuan, 60 juan in 6 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), v. 3, j. 29, p. 1353. The attributed authorship has long been considered spurious.

⁵⁹ Wang Jingwei, “Sanshi'er nian sanyue ershisani zai Guangzhou Mingsong jinian xuexiao zhishu, shu duo mumian ji gui. Zhongming mo yu sanyue ershiyiri, cigao moyu bayue ershi'erri, shi dang liang shu huashi ye” 三十二年三月二十三日在廣州鳴崧紀念學校植樹, 樹多木棉及桂。仲鳴沒於三月二十一日, 次高沒於八月二十二日, 適當兩樹花時也, in *Shuangzhaolou shici gao*, p. 331.

both called Jing Ke a “mere robber” (*dao* 盜); if he had succeeded, however, no one would ever have called him so.⁶⁰ Wang then declares that Jing Ke’s spirit never truly died. It inspired, for instance, Zhang Liang 張良 (d. 186 BCE) to throw an iron hammer at the First Emperor at Bolang 博浪 (in today’s Henan Province); Zhang later became an advisor to the founder of the Han dynasty.

But if the first poem speaks of Wang’s moral confidence, the second poem betrays a moment of hesitance and shame. He opens the painting in 1942 and is reminded of the tragic gap between his current and younger selves. Had he died in 1910, he would have already gone down in history as another Jing Ke. Instead, he is alive, graying, and the object of patriotic anger. For him, life and death are equally unenviable. With this sense of “shame,” Wang invokes Zheng Guo—a hydraulic engineer from Han who proposed building a canal for the Qin, only to be exposed as a Han agent intending to divert Qin’s resources and delay its attack on Han. Zheng Guo defended himself by saying that the Qin would benefit from the canal all the same. Ying Zheng agreed. The canal enriched the Qin and fueled its war of conquest. Thus, although building the canal prolonged the survival of the Han for a few years, it ultimately aided the Qin.⁶¹

Wang Jingwei contrasts his kinship with Zheng Guo to his “envy” of Wang Qi—a teenager who died in a battle for Lu. Afterward, the Lu people wanted to sacrifice to him as a martyr (*shang* 殤), but because of his young age, they were uncertain and consulted Confucius. Confucius opined that anyone who died for his country could properly be given sacrifices as though he were an adult.⁶² By comparing himself to Zheng Guo, Wang Jingwei appears to admit that his regime had assisted Japan’s war, despite his best intentions; he thus reminds us that a patriot can simultaneously be a collaborator. And he is afraid that if China should prevail, he—unlike Wang Qi—will not go down favorably in history, regardless of his sacrifice.

⁶⁰ Yuan Mei, “Jing Ke shu dao lun” 荊軻書盜論, in *Xiaocang shanfang shiwen ji* 小倉山房詩文集, 42 *juan* in 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), v. 2, j. 20, p. 1583. For Yang Xiong, see Wang Rongbao 汪榮寶, *Fayan yishu* 法言義疏, 20 *juan* in 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), v. 2, j. 16, p. 419. For Sima Guang, see *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, 294 *juan* in 20 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), v. 1, j. 7, p. 232.

⁶¹ Sima Qian, “Hequshu di-qi” 河渠書第七, in *Shiji*, v. 4, j. 29, p. 1408.

⁶² “Tangong xia di-si zhi er” 檀弓下第四之二, in *Liji jijie* 禮記集解, ed. Sun Xidan 孫希旦, 61 *juan* in 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), v. 1, j. 11, pp. 282–83.

The second half of the second poem is full of ambivalent allusions. “Potsherds” refers to the story of Meng Min 孟敏, whose vase falls to the ground and is broken to pieces. Meng walks on without even casting a glance at it, to spare futile regrets.⁶³ The “lost goat” comes from a story about the philosopher Yang Zhu 楊朱, whose neighbors fail to find a lost goat, because the road keeps forking into branches so that they cannot possibly exhaust all the possibilities.⁶⁴ The tears refer to a different story about Yang Zhu, where he is found crying at a crossroad because any step onto a wrong path will take him farther away from his goal.⁶⁵

This penultimate couplet thus appears to say that China’s limited territories cannot afford to devolve into potsherds and that there is no use in spilling tears for unrecoverable losses. But is Wang Jingwei suggesting that the lost territories have been irrevocably lost? For the couplet can also be interpreted in a deeply personal fashion. Yang Zhu was moved to tears from fear of making the wrong choice. We know that as a politician whose only capital was his reputation for moral integrity, Wang Jingwei was keenly aware of his public image. Accounts of his final years tell of a man tormented by depression, remorse, and trepidation in the face of eternal damnation.⁶⁶ In this couplet, he might be saying that there is no need to cry, since the goat has already gone down a path, whether right or wrong. Thus, the couplet can also be read as saying that Wang must stay with his choice and make the best of it.

The last couplet raises further questions. On the surface, it shows resolution for continuous resistance. This is Liu Wei-Chih’s interpretation. He relates the metal that Wang imagines for the Great Wall to the pot metaphor that Wang used in his 1910 letter to Hu Hanmin. Liu suggests that although thirty years earlier Wang saw himself as firewood, by 1942, Wang saw himself as the pot that must endure the heat to bring food to the populace.⁶⁷ However, this reading appears tenuous. If we

⁶³ “Guo Fu Xu liezhuan” 郭符許列傳, in *Hou Hanshu jijie* 後漢書集解, ed. Wang Xianqian 王先謙, 120 *juan* in 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), v. 2, j. 68, p. 784.

⁶⁴ “Shuofu pian” 說符篇, in *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, 8 *juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), j. 8, pp. 265–66.

⁶⁵ “Wangba pian di-shiyi” 王霸篇第十一, in *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, ed. Wang Xianqian, 20 *juan* in 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), v. 1, j. 7, pp. 218–19.

⁶⁶ Jin Xiongбай 金雄白 (Zhu Zijia 朱子家, pseud.), *Wang Zhengquan de kaichang yu shouchang* 汪政權的開場與收場, 5 vols. (Hong Kong: Chunqiu zazhishe, 1959–1964), v. 2, p. 103.

⁶⁷ Liu Wei-Chih, “Liang Wang,” pp. 225–26.

relate the last couplet to the apparent motif of the poem—Jing Ke—we may reach a dramatically different interpretation. After all, this couplet states exactly what the Qin did. After the unification of China, the First Emperor built the Great Wall on the northern borders to fend off the nomadic Huns; he also had all weapons (made of metal) collected from the whole empire and recast into ritual musical instruments and gigantic statues.⁶⁸ This reading would also explain Wang's presentation of himself as another shameful Zheng Guo.

Putting the ending of the two poems together, we see that the “continuous resistance” of individual heroes from Jing Ke to Zhang Liang did not stop the Qin from unifying China, even though its empire was short-lived. Wang's poems thus bespeak his patriotic devotion as much as his pessimism about the short-term effectiveness of resistance. Bear in mind that when Wang composed the poems, Japan was still on the offensive (the war did not turn until the Battle of Midway in June 1942). Indeed, on February 15, 1942, the very day when these poems were published in *Accord*, British troops in Singapore surrendered to the Japanese army. Despite setbacks, Japanese aggression in China continued through December 1944, with Operation Ichi-gō (Ichi-gō sakusen 一号作战). It is thus possible that Wang, when writing the poems, was unsure that Japan would lose the war.

Interpreted this way, the poems enter a dialogue with Ren Yuandao's deliberate act of showing Wang the painting. Ren Yuandao's contact with the GMD in Chongqing suggests that, at that time, he felt uncertain about Japan's future and wanted to diversify his bid. And if we assume that showing Gao Qifeng's painting to Wang Jingwei was a subtle policy proposal related to Ren's own judgment of the war, we may conclude that Ren was trying to inspire Wang to be Jing Ke again—to roll out the map and pretend to surrender but plan to strike at the last moment.

Wang's two poems on seeing the painting also respond to Long's and Li's lyric songs that were attached to Gao's painting as colophons. Wang replies to the sense of optimistic suspension at the end of Long's poem with less resolution. Where Long's Jing Ke is heading toward the Qin court to bravely throw the dice, his shadow flapping through vast

⁶⁸ Sima Qian, “Qinshihuang benji di-liu” 秦始皇本紀第六, in *Shiji*, v. 1, j. 6, pp. 239, 280–81.

plains like a bird of death, Wang Jingwei sees himself as walking down one path among many—not knowing if he is right or wrong, but with a presentiment of his failure and eternal disgrace. In his reply to Li Xuanti's comparison of Jing Ke to Cao Mo and Zhuan Zhu, Wang compares himself instead to Zheng Guo, a de facto collaborator, and to Wang Qi, whose martyrdom was not uncontested. While Wang Qi's martyrdom was ultimately confirmed, Wang Jingwei foresees that his own probably will not be.

Li Xuanti and Long Yusheng both responded to Wang Jingwei's poems. Li composed two further poems, matching Wang's in rhyme and emphasizing again both Jing Ke's courage and Jing Ke as a lasting inspiration. One of Li's couplets argues:

客異舞陽容有濟 Were the assistant different from Wuyang, it
 might have worked;
 事同曹劌故非常 His deeds were extraordinary, just like Cao Gui's.⁶⁹

Using the allusion to Cao Mo, Li Xuanti emphasizes that Jing Ke's ideal result would have been to force the King of Qin to sign a peace treaty and that it might have worked if only his companions had been braver than Qin Wuyang. Li boldly proposes that they—faithful followers of Wang Jingwei and the Peace movement—are better companions than Qin Wuyang, ergo making Wang's plan feasible.

Long Yusheng's response is the opera libretto *Bidding Farewell at River Yi*. He certainly was aware of other contemporaneous plays and operas that elaborated on this historical theme, including Gu Yuxiu's play performed in Chongqing in 1941. Long's libretto therefore was intended to rival theirs in interpreting the cultural memory of Jing Ke for the masses. In the foreword, Long states that although his opera mostly follows traditional Chinese opera libretto styles, he hopes to commission "new musicians" (*xinxing yuejia* 新興樂家) to write a modern score.⁷⁰ This hope suggests that he had in mind more popular forms of entertainment than traditional opera.

⁶⁹ Li Xuanti, "Ciyun Jingwei xiansheng ti *Yishui songbie tu*, ershou" 次均精衛先生題易水送別圖二首, *Tongsheng* 2.2 (1942), p. 141. Cao Gui 曹劌 is a figure who appeared in *Zuozhuan* 左傳. Many historians suggest that he and Cao Mo are the same person; Li Ling 李零, "Weishenme shuo Cao Gui he Cao Mo shi tongyiren—wei duzhe shiyi, jiantan bingfa yu cike de guanxi" 为什么说曹劌和曹沫是同一人——为读者释疑, 兼谈兵法与刺客的关系, *Dushu* 读书 9 (2004): 129–34.

⁷⁰ Long Yusheng, untitled preface to *Yishui songbie (lishi geju)*, p. 91.

Long establishes from the beginning that this opera is about the new Jing Ke—Wang Jingwei, in 1910 as well as 1942. The opera's first three lines are a chorus:

落落死生原一瞬	With grace shall one cross the gap between life and death;
奮迅為仁	stimulate [the resolution] to become benevolence;
成敗何須問	success or failure is of no concern!

The first line of Long's chorus directly quotes the fifth line of Wang's first response poem. The second line refers to Wang's 1910 epistle to Hu Hanmin, which argues that "the courage of revolution is born out of the heart of benevolence" 革命之勇氣由仁心而生者也.⁷¹ This line further points out the influence that Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472–1529) idealistic moral philosophy had on Wang Jingwei throughout his life. According to Wang Yangming, the cognitive effort to recognize the "heart of benevolence" lays the foundation for ensuing benevolent actions. By cultivating the root of benevolence in everyone's heart, one will eventually bring peace to the all under Heaven.⁷² The third line again adapts Wang's verse, referencing the sixth line of Wang's first response poem.

These poems invited a sarcastic response from Liang Hongzhi 梁鴻志 (1883–1946), President of the Control Yuan (Jiancha yuanshang 監察院長) and Wang's rival. Liang Hongzhi was never friends with Wang Jingwei. He came from a family that was prominent under the Qing, and he served in the Beiyang 北洋 government (1912–1928). After the GMD took over, Liang went into retirement. Having initiated contact with the Japanese during the mid-1920s, Liang was recruited to head the Reformed Government (Zhonghua minguo weixin zhengfu 中華民國維新政府; 1938–1940) at Nanjing, only to see himself superseded by the more prestigious Wang Jingwei. In the RNG, Liang's position was a sinecure. His discontent is apparent in these verses.

His four quatrains target what he perceives as Wang and his clique's moral self-delusion:

⁷¹ Wang Jingwei, "Yu Hanmin shu," j. 4, p. 83.

⁷² Wang Yangming, "Daxue wen" 大學問, in *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集, 41 *juan* in 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), v. 2, j. 26: 967–73.

梁鴻志，為援道題易水送別圖

Liang Hongzhi, "On the Painting *Bidding Farewell at River Yi*,
at Yuandao's Request"

其一 No. 1

腐遷史筆久傳神	The brush of castrated historian Qian vividly conveys the spirit;
不如丹青為寫真	But it still cannot compare to the painter's faithful portrait.
今日圖窮無匕首	Today the map has unrolled to its end, yet no dagger is there;
眼中何限虎狼秦	How many bestial Qins do our eyes actually see?

其二 No. 2

真堪立懦與廉頑	Truly a story to hearten and inspire—
變徵聲中去不還	When the music of pathos soared, he departed on a mission of no return.
刺客國殤休等視	But do not take assassins or national martyrs lightly;
怕人孤注擲江山	I am afraid the country is at stake in a desperate bet.

其三 No. 3

自是荊軻劍術疎	Undoubtedly Jing Ke's swordsmanship was wanting,
虛捐樊首督亢圖	Wasting Fan Wuqi's head and the map of Dugang!
輪它劉季提三尺	Greater was Liu Bang, a single sword in hand,
臣服燕秦罵豎儒	Subjugating the Qin empire, putting the pedants to shame!

其四 No. 4

神勇方能致太平	Only extraordinary courage can bring peace—
期君此事學荊卿	I hope you, sir, will learn from Master Jing on this matter!

田光老矣無人問 Now that Tian Guang is old, his home is off the
 beaten path;
 夜誦陰符坐到明 All night he chanted a scripture of immortality,
 sitting till dawn.⁷³

These four poems demonstrate the discord between Liang Hongzhi, on the one hand, and Wang Jingwei's coterie, on the other. While praising the painting, Liang's first quatrain emphasizes that there is no "dagger" hiding at the end of the proverbial scroll. In other words, if Wang Jingwei were Jing Ke, the analogy goes no further than Jing Ke's sending a message of Yan's subjugation to the Qin court—had there been no dagger, Jing Ke would have been a collaborator too. Liang's second quatrain further dresses down Long Yusheng's first poem by saying that a state's fate is too great to stake on a bet; after all, Jing Ke's failure hastened the Qin invasion of Yan.

In the third quatrain, Liang ruthlessly points out Jing Ke's deficiency in martial arts skills. Qin Wuyang's cowardice notwithstanding, Jing Ke, as a warrior who volunteered for the mission, has no excuse for failing twice to strike an unprepared king. Liang thus jabs at Wang Jingwei's lament that greater swordsmen than he have hidden in reclusion. In Liang's view, it would have been better for Jing Ke either to recommend someone more skilled than himself or to abort the mission, at least sparing the head of Fan Wuqi and the valuable map. By comparison, Liu Bang 劉邦 (ca. 256–195 BCE; r. 202–195 BCE), who did not rely on such opportunistic means as assassination, rose from the rank of commoners and founded the Han dynasty.⁷⁴

The last quatrain pays almost sarcastic courtesy to Wang Jingwei, asking him to emulate Jing Ke's courage, and nothing more, in order to realize the ultimate goal of the Peace movement. Finally, Liang Hongzhi compares himself to Tian Guang. In the *Shiji* story, when Prince Dan first asked Tian Guang for his service, Tian declined on account of his age. But the phrase *Tian Guang lao yi* 田光老矣 (Now Tian Guang is old) alludes to the story of Lian Po 廉頗 (327–243 BCE), a great general no longer trusted due to his advanced age, even though he remained strong and ready to serve.⁷⁵ The Southern Song poet Xin

⁷³ Liang Hongzhi, "Wei Yuandao ti *Yishui songbie tu*," *Tongsheng* 2.2 (1942): 140.

⁷⁴ *Sanchi* alludes to Liu Bang's own boasting; Sima Qian, "Gaozu benji di-ba" 高祖本紀第八, in *Shiji*, v. 2, j. 8, p. 391.

⁷⁵ Sima Qian, "Lianpo linxiangru liezhuan di-ershiyi" 廉頗藺相如列傳第二十一, in *Shiji*, v. 8, j. 81, pp. 2448–49.

Qiji, with his military ambitions, once compared himself to Lian Po and lamented:

憑誰問 Who would ask,
廉頗老矣 Now that Lian Po is old,
尚能飯否 does he still have a good appetite?⁷⁶

Liang Hongzhi's declaration that he is old and has no ambition other than practicing the Daoist art, therefore, is clear irony. The last line is a barely veiled request to be taken seriously—implying that he is willing to replace Wang Jingwei, if Japan is listening.

Liang's most ambivalent statement, however, is the ending of the first quatrain. What did Liang Hongzhi mean by asking his rhetorical question with the phrase “how many” (*hexian* 何限), a phrase that may also be understood as “limitless”? Since Liang disapproves of the whole Jing Ke obsession, it seems unlikely that he is comparing Japan to Qin. So does “bestial Qins” refer to conquest in general, to Western imperialists, or to the rival Nationalist (GMD) and Communist powers? The ambivalent nature of allusions prevents a clear answer, but at the very least, Liang's poems reveal ruptures in the Wang regime. After all, if there is no hidden dagger, Jing Ke's mission was only to surrender.

Thus unsurprisingly, only Liang's poems were excluded from the republication in *National Art* two months later. Moreover, Long Yusheng's opera *Bidding Farewell at River Yi* cites all the other poems in this exchange except Liang's, yet it also takes a closing jab at Liang by declaring:

世間無限虎狼秦 In this world, there are endless bestial Qins!
火傳薪自繼 As long as the flame transmits, the firewood
 renews itself;
飯熟鑊常新 Wherever the rice is cooked, the pot remains new.⁷⁷

Notably, Long quotes Liang's line and attempts to either clarify or redefine its meaning. Long argues that it is exactly because of the endless Qins in the world that revolts are endless too. He uses the metaphor “transmitting the flame” (*huochuan* 火傳) from *Zhuangzi* 莊子, referring to the Daoist cultivation that nourishes an eternal life.⁷⁸ And he

⁷⁶ Xin Qiji, “Yongyule: Jingkou Beiguting huaigu” 永遇樂·京口北固亭懷古, *Jiaxuan-ci biannian jianzhu*, j. 5, p. 553.

⁷⁷ Long Yusheng, *Yishui songbie (lishi geju)*, p. 105.

⁷⁸ “Yangsheng zhu” 養生主, *juan 3 of Neipian* 內篇, in *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, 33 *juan*

connects it to Wang Jingwei's own favorite set of metaphors (firewood, rice, and pot). Thus, Long suggests that the heroic spirit has been transmitted to Wang Jingwei—not only from Jing Ke, but also from Wang Jingwei's younger self. This transmission forms a unity of revolutionary passion across time.

Similar messages celebrating Wang Jingwei as Jing Ke occurred later in 1942 via the cycle of poems on the painting *Remembering the Past at Yinding Bridge* (*Yiding qiao hua wang tu* 銀錠橋話往圖), commissioned by Zhang Cixi 張次溪 (1909–1968), chronicler of Wang's assassination attempt.⁷⁹ Wang's followers showed a high degree of unity in interpreting Jing Ke's story. They chose to ignore some inconvenient details (some of which Liang raised) and focused instead on the significance of Jing Ke's rebellious spirit. By making this choice, they also quietly sidelined the role of Prince Dan, construing Jing Ke's actions as fully voluntary. And despite their differences, all the poets in Wang's coterie explicitly or implicitly compared Japan to Qin, a comparison made more striking by Liang Hongzhi's vehement denial.

At this point, an inevitable question arises. Is it really possible that, in an open publication, these collaborators—who served under Japanese surveillance—could call for stabbing Japan in the back? The ambivalent nature of poetic allusions suggests other potential explanations.

Burying the Dagger

Despite the cruelty of the Qin conquest, it unified China. The historical allusion of the dagger is thus double-edged, signifying both resignation and resistance. This double meaning manifests in how the officially approved discourse of pan-Asianism (J., *ajia shugi* アジア主義; Ch. *da Yazhou zhuyi* 大亞洲主義) permeated the elite collaborators' private imaginings. The journal *Accord* (*Tongsheng*), where the poems were published, embodied both meanings. Because it was edited by Wang's confidante Long Yusheng, the journal closely reflected Wang's personal literary taste and propagandist guidelines. The stated purpose of

in 4 vols., ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), v. 1, j. 2A (二上), pp. 129–30.

⁷⁹ Zhang Cixi, "Wang Jingwei xiansheng gengxu mengnan shilu" 汪精衛先生庚戌蒙難實錄, *Yuefeng* 越風, 2.3 (1937): 4–16 and 2.4 (1937): 1–8; republished in *Wang Jingwei xiansheng xing shilu* 汪精衛先生行實錄 (Dongguan: Zhangshi baiyuantang, 1943).

Accord was to promote East Asian peace by drawing on the transformational power of poetry.

Long Yusheng promotes the idea of East Asian peace as genuine equality of Asian nations, hereby rejecting Japanese dominance.⁸⁰ He explains that the term *tongsheng* comes from the received commentary on the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) for the *jiuwu* 九五 (nine in the fifth [place]) line of the Heaven (*qian* 乾) hexagram. The line states, “Flying dragon in the heavens; it furthers one to see the great man” 飛龍在天利見大人; the commentary explains, “Things that accord in tone vibrate together; things that accord in their inmost natures seek one another” 同聲相應, 同氣相求.⁸¹ Long argues that all human beings are moved by *sheng* 聲 (tone) and *qi* 氣 (inmost nature); in this context, the pair of terms may be understood as referring to art—poetry is art, par excellence—and moral character. Moved by emotions, all beings strive for truth, goodness, and beauty. Long then cites Tang poet Bai Juyi’s 白居易 (772–846) poetic theory: “The Sage brings peace to all under Heaven by moving people’s hearts” 聖人感人心而天下和平.⁸² Long perceives the world as a cruel place where countries “vie for hegemony” (*zhengxiong zhengba* 爭雄爭霸) and the flame of humanism (*rendao* 人道) is almost extinguished; he sees the introduction of “materialist culture” (*wuzhi wenming* 物質文明) of the West, in particular, as driving China and Japan to mutual harm.⁸³ He thus hopes to remind both countries of their fraternal past—for example, in the Tang dynasty, when Chinese and Japanese poets exchanged poems and shared fond feelings for each other. Long suggests that poetry can be a pedagogic device for transforming human hearts toward cultural refinement and moral kindness. Classical-style poetry, in particular, is more musical and therefore more effective than vernacular poetry in moving hearts. He hopes that the publication of *Accord* will make a small contribution to broaden Confucian teaching through poetry

⁸⁰ Long Yusheng, “Tongsheng yuekan yuanqi” 同聲月刊緣起, *Tongsheng* 1.1 (1941): 1–4.

⁸¹ *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義, annot. Wang Bi 王弼 and Kong Yingda 孔穎達, 9 *juan*, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), v. 1, j. 1, p. 2. My translation is based on the German translation by Richard Wilhelm, *I Ging: Text und Materialien* (Cologne: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1987), pp. 29–30.

⁸² Bai Juyi, “Yu Yuan Jiu shu” 與元九書, in *Bai Juyi ji* 白居易集, ed. Gu Xuejie 顧學頤, 71 *juan* in 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), v. 3, j. 45, p. 960.

⁸³ Long Yusheng, “Tongsheng yuekan yuanqi,” p. 2.

(*shijiao* 詩教), bring peace and order to China, and realize the ideal of “great unity” (*datong* 大同) everywhere.⁸⁴

The term *tongsheng* echoes the contemporaneous Japanese propaganda that China and Japan shared the same script and belonged to the same race (J., *tōbun tōsho* 同文同種). But instead of stressing their imagined sameness, *tongsheng* presents an image of mutually independent voices that sing in harmony and equality. Furthermore, Long’s readers would have been aware of the full commentary in the *Book of Changes* on this line, including “The Sage arises, and all beings follow him with their eyes” 聖人作而萬物覩.⁸⁵

The allusion to this hexagram in the journal title, therefore, seems to hint that hearts will be moved and universal peace regained with the rise of a Sage. This allusion gives centrality to Wang Jingwei, not his Japanese patrons, as the true moral center of a new East Asia. A reader may also notice that, by placing blame on China and Japan equally, Long Yusheng avoids castigating Japanese jingoism for the war of invasion. But in choosing classical-style over vernacular poetry, Long must have intended the Japanese conquerors to read the poems too—thereby potentially having their hearts moved by Wang Jingwei, the auspicious new Sage.

By this reading, Wang’s spirit of self-sacrifice as well as his power of persuasion is precisely the “dagger” of resistance. If Wang were to succeed, the “bestial Qin” would disappear, replaced by a benign Confucian power that conquers not by brutal violence but by moral example. This reading is the same vision of pan-Asianism that Sun Yat-sen promoted in a 1924 speech given at Kobe during his last trip to Japan. Sun argues that Japan should follow the Confucian ideal of the “kingly way” (*wangdao* 王道)—namely, a leadership based on benevolence and quality—and reject the Western imperialist “hegemonic way” (*badao* 霸道) based on military conquest.⁸⁶ Occurring four months before his death, the trip’s opportune timing endorsed the RNG’s claim as fulfilling Sun’s final legacy. Wang Jingwei later repeatedly proclaimed there existed genuine equality between Japan and China. Though this

⁸⁴ Long Yusheng, “Tongsheng yuekan yuanqi,” p. 4.

⁸⁵ *Zhouyi zhengyi*, v. 1, j. 1, p. 4; cf. Wilhelm, *I Ging*, p. 30.

⁸⁶ Sun Yat-sen [Sun Zhongshan], “Dui Shenhu shangye huiyisuo deng tuanti de yan-shuo” 对神户商业会议所等团体的演说, in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 孙中山全集, 11 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), v. 11, pp. 401–9.

claim was obviously thin in reality, he insisted on it despite domestic and international censure.⁸⁷ According to Wang, nationalism was the means to awaken the Chinese nation's self-consciousness and to rally its solidarity, while pan-Asianism was the means for East Asian peoples to realize the same goals; ultimately universal equality would be realized.⁸⁸ This vision of pan-Asian equality and fraternity was the official line taken up by the Wang regime. By adopting the puppet master's propaganda, Wang effectively turned it into a rhetorical weapon against the conqueror. Before and throughout its short existence, the Wang group never stopped renegotiating their terms of cooperation with Japan, every time gaining a modicum more autonomy.⁸⁹

Pan-Asianism first appeared as a theory in late nineteenth-century Japan to promote regional cooperation of Asian peoples against Western colonial powers. Compared to the traditional Sinocentric East Asian order, pan-Asianism appeared to be a more modern transnationalist ideology that could serve as an integrating force and help to fulfill the requirement for the rising Japan to de-center China.⁹⁰ On the other hand, the Sinocentric hierarchical view of the world also encouraged some Japanese pan-Asianists to envision a new East Asian order with Japan as the new Middle Kingdom. As early as 1910, the rhetoric of pan-Asianism was used by the Japanese government to legitimize Japan's annexation of Korea.⁹¹ In WWII, Japan used it as propaganda

⁸⁷ See, for instance, the *New York Times* report of Wang's inaugural speech at the founding of the RNG, especially under the heading "Equality Is Claimed"; Douglas Robertson, "Wang in Inaugural Defers to Japan," *New York Times*, March 31, 1940, p. 38.

⁸⁸ Wang Jingwei, "Minzu zhuyi yu da Yazhou zhuyi" 民族主義與大亞洲主義, published across RNG journals; see, for instance, *Xianzheng yuekan* 憲政月刊, 1.3 (1940): 3–5. Many historians note the Wang group's endeavor to achieve peace based on equality; see, for example, Gerald Bunker, *The Peace Conspiracy: Wang Ching-wei and the China War, 1937–1941* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 252–80.

⁸⁹ On negotiations between the Wang group and Japan, see *Wang Jingwei guomin zhengfu chengli: Wang wei zhengquan ziliao xuanbian* 汪精卫国民政府成立: 汪伪政权资料选编, ed. Huang Meizhen 黄美真 and Zhang Yun 張雲, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1984), v. 1, pp. 64–138, and v. 2, pp. 408–597; *Wang wei zhengquan* 汪伪政权, ed. Ma Zhendu 马振犊 and Zhao Yueqin 赵月琴 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), pp. 732–909. The most comprehensive description of the Wang government's effort of state-building to date is David Serfass, "Le gouvernement collaborateur de Wang Jingwei: Aspects de l'État d'occupation durant la guerre sino-japonaise, 1940–1945" (PhD diss., École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2017).

⁹⁰ Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman, introduction to *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History*, ed. Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman, 2 vols. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), v. 1, p. 9.

⁹¹ Saaler and Szpilman, introduction to *Pan-Asianism*, v. 1, p. 10.

to justify its aggression in Asia, claiming it was liberating the Asian nations it conquered from the shackles of Western imperialism.

Wang and his clique's proclamations therefore reflect a deliberate strategy to exploit Japan's moralistic rhetoric. From the end of the First World War, Wang repeatedly warned that Japan was China's most devious and dangerous enemy.⁹² His later repeated assertions that Japan's peace offer was sincere therefore seem calculated. Moreover, for such rhetorical resistance to work, Wang's partner Japan would have to possess at least some moral sense of justice. Arguably, many among Wang's Japanese supporters shared this moral vision of Japan.

Kagesa Sadaaki 影佐禎昭 (1893–1948), Inukai Takeru 犬養健 (1896–1960), and Imai Takeo 今井武夫 (1898–1982)—who promoted and implemented the “Wang Zhaoming mission” (J., *Ō Chōmei kōsaku* 汪兆銘工作) that lured Wang to escape Chongqing in December 1938 to start negotiating peace terms with Japan—survived the war to tell their stories. They were against Japan's further expansion into China (after solidifying control of Manchuria), so they saw in Wang Jingwei a chance to end the mutually destructive war. Kagesa and Inukai, who brought Wang from Hanoi to Japan for negotiations, professed to be moved by Wang's sincere patriotism and were dismayed by the cruel conditions that the Kōain 興亞院 (East Asian development board; a cabinet-level agency, 1938–1942) demanded Wang Jingwei follow to establish a government. They were aware that agreeing to such conditions would thoroughly discredit the Wang regime in the Chinese people's eyes.⁹³ Inukai laments that the army in particular tried to reserve the best possible offer for Chiang Kai-shek; Wang was first lured by Japan's empty promise and then betrayed into wasting his political capital by such disingenuous handling.⁹⁴ Because of Kagesa's sympathy, the Ume Kikan 梅機関 (Plum flower agency) that he led,

⁹² See, for instance, Wang Jingwei, “Bali Hehui yu Zhong Ri wenti” 巴黎和會與中日問題, pt. 1, *Jianshe* 建設 1.6 (1920): 1059–72; and Wang Jingwei, “Bali Hehui yu Zhong Ri wenti,” pt. 2, *Jianshe* 2.1 (1920): 87–116.

⁹³ Inukai Takeru, *Yōsukō wa imamo nagareteiru* 揚子江は今も流れている (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1984), pp. 157–60, 163–64; Kagesa Sadaaki, *Sō soro waki* 曾走路我記, in *Ningen Kagesa Sadaaki* 人間影佐禎昭, ed. Makimoto Shigeharu 松本重治 (Tokyo: Ningen, Kagesa Sadaaki shuppan sewaninkai, 1980), pp. 72–74.

⁹⁴ Inukai Takeru, *Yōsukō wa imamo nagareteiru*, pp. 217–18, 311–13. According to GMD intelligence, however, it was the Japanese navy and senior cabinet members who preferred to talk with Chiang and thus sabotaged the negotiation with Wang; GMD intelligence report, 20 November 1939; MS no. 002-080200-00519-160, President Chiang Kai-shek

though generally perceived as the puppet master controlling the RNG, at times played a mediating role between the exacting Japanese cabinet and military and the Chinese nationalist-collaborators.⁹⁵ These Japanese agents, despite their sympathy for Wang, continued to obey their orders and serve the empire's war machine. Nonetheless, their support was crucial to the survival of the RNG, though it was not enough to make it truly independent.

Imai, a prolific memoirist after the war, admitted that seeking a peaceful solution to the war was like chasing a phantom. As Japan was the invader, those Chinese who called for anything less than total resistance were regarded as traitors. The National Government was fearful of losing public support to the communists and losing the goodwill of its Western allies. But Japanese society was also seized by an illusion of moral grandeur, seeing the invasion a "just" war to prevent China from cultural decline and to liberate it from a degenerate dictatorship. Those Japanese who dared to speak out in favor of a peaceful solution were immediately denounced as enemies of the state.⁹⁶ Imai never expected to realize peace through Wang, but he admired Wang as a person nonetheless. He kept Wang's poetry anthology, *Poetry on the Double-Shining Tower*, as a cherished family heirloom.⁹⁷

Kagesa's, Inukai's, and Imai's postwar narratives share one further common trait: a personal relation with Wang built upon the latter's seemingly candid demeanor and trust. As Gerald Bunker wryly remarks, "Wang was one of the most daring brokers in history," attempting to bring China and Japan together "by selling each on the non-existent conciliatory spirit of the other."⁹⁸ Wang's sincerity, masterfully performed, was his trademark as a politician. The Japanese agents never expected Wang to be anything less than a Chinese patriot; nor did they ever suspect his collaboration to be a plot against Japan. They consid-

Collection 蔣中正總統文物, Academia Historica 國史館, Taipei, <https://ahonline.drnh.gov.tw/index.php?act=Display/image/813892EW=Uv=3#d9l>.

⁹⁵ Ume Kikan was set up specifically to handle negotiations with Wang Jingwei about the terms to set up the Wang regime. *Ume* 梅 (plum) was the secret code name for Wang because he loved plum flowers.

⁹⁶ Imai Takeo, *Shina jihen no kaisō* 支那事變の回想 (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 1964), pp. 219–21.

⁹⁷ Hironaka Issei 広中一成 and Imai Sadao 今井貞夫, *Nitchū wahei kōsaku no kiroku: Imai Takeo to Ō Chōmei, Shō Kaiseki* 日中和平工作の記録: 今井武夫と汪兆銘・蔣介石 (Tokyo: Sairyūsha, 2013), pp. 235–36.

⁹⁸ Bunker, *Peace Conspiracy*, pp. 161, 190.

ered him simultaneously a nationalist and a genuine pan-Asianist. For these Japanese supporters of Wang, his revolutionary credentials and his moral profile as a patriot were essential to lend minimal credibility to the Peace movement. A mere puppet regime would not work. Ironically, therefore, Wang Jingwei's iconography as poet and assassin became a central part of the Japanese propaganda around him.

From the very beginning of his "cooperation," Wang's altruistic patriotism was his selling point. Japan's prime minister Konoe Fumimaro 近衛文麿 (1891–1945) prompted Wang's collaboration when he declared that Japan would not negotiate with Chiang Kai-shek and that Japan sought a peaceful solution of the war. Konoe stressed in an open article (on November 10, 1939) that Wang was the political heir of Sun Yat-sen, the most senior among the GMD leaders, and an erstwhile assassin. He suspected that Wang was nothing less than the reincarnation of Zhang Liang, who failed to assassinate the First Emperor but supported the founding of the Han dynasty. Wang's courage and charisma made him the only possible candidate to Konoe as the "great director of a new China" (*shin chūgoku no daishidōsha* 新中国の大指導者).⁹⁹ A February 8, 1940, news release by the China Expeditionary Army (J., Shina hakengun 支那派遣軍), Japan's army group responsible for operations in China, reported that General Itagaki Seishirō 板垣征四郎 (1885–1948) praised all collaborators—especially Wang and his followers—as heroes, risking their lives to save China. Itagaki acknowledged that it was Wang's candidness that had convinced him of Wang's sincerity.¹⁰⁰

Wang's credentials gave his regime the prestige and legitimacy that the Japanese desperately desired for their local collaborators; it also lent their pan-Asianist propaganda an air of credibility. Given China's and Japan's long traditions of founding political legitimacy on moral integrity, Wang's past as an assassin appeared in virtually all the major introductions of him to the Japanese public. The writer Itō Ken 井東憲 (1895–1945), for instance, wrote a pamphlet profiling Wang, *Talking about Wang Zhaoming* (*Ō Chōmei wo kataru* 汪兆銘を語る). It describes Wang's 1910 assassination attempt and imprisonment as

⁹⁹ Konoe Fumimaro, "Wang xiansheng he wo" 汪先生和我, in *Heping fangong jianguo wenxian* 和平反共建國文獻, ed. Xuanchuan bu, 2 vols. (Nanjing: Zhongyang shubao fangingsuo, 1941), v. 2, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Itagaki Seishirō, "Lun Zhong Ri jian zhi genben wenti" 論中日間之根本問題, in *Heping fangong jianguo wenxian*, v. 1, pp. 20, 23.

his first ordeal and mentions Prince Su's recognition of him as a once-in-a-century hero. With such a romanticized background, Itō's pamphlet narrates Wang's whole life in the best possible light and presents his collaboration as conducted with a do-or-die spirit (J., *kesshi teki kakugo* 決死的覺悟).¹⁰¹

A much more extensive Japanese biography of Wang (326 pages), written by Lieutenant Yamanaka Minetarō 山中峯太郎 (1885–1966)—published in January 1942 and titled *The Great Director of the New China: Wang Jingwei (Shin Chūgoku no daishidōsha: Ō Seiei* 新中国の大指導者: 汪精衛)—explicitly refers to Kono's expectation of Wang's role. The book dedicates almost thirty pages to Wang's short career as an assassin, cites Wang's poems as revelations of his nobility, and praises Wang's defense of China's rights.¹⁰² Toward the end, the propagandist acknowledges the numerous difficulties still challenging East Asian peace, but he asserts that Wang's personality and determination will aid Japan in overcoming these difficulties.

Yamanaka's book includes an illustration of Wang on the final page. The image shows Wang dressed in suit and tie, sitting by a wooden desk, holding a brush in hand, and writing on a piece of paper with great concentration (fig. 1). This illustration is based on a photo of Wang, taken by his daughter Wang Wenxing 汪文愷 (1914–2015), that shows him writing with a brush and dressed in Qing-era scholar's garb (fig. 2). The Japanese illustrator not only transformed Wang's clothing into a modern, Western style—so as to fit the book's purpose of presenting Wang as leader of a “new” China—but also added Chinese text. By using Wang's calligraphy and signature (shown in fig. 3), the illustrator implies that the image (in fig. 1) captures Wang at the moment of writing the added slogan: “Advance, toward the goal of China's renaissance and East Asia's renaissance!” The calligraphy expressed Wang's hope for the RNG, not long before its founding, and is consistent with his argument that Chinese nationalism was the foundation of a pan-Asianism based on genuine equality. Although the photo captures Wang in an intimate moment as a Chinese scholar, the illustration is stylized—combining both modern (suit) and traditional (brush) features to create an image of a statesman whose visual appearance presents

¹⁰¹ Itō Ken, *Ō Chōmei wo kataru* (Tokyo: Tōa shinkō kai, 1939), pp. 4, 9.

¹⁰² Yamanaka Minetarō, *Shin Chūgoku no daishidōsha: Ō Seiei* (Tokyo: Chōbunkaku, 1942), pp. 46–73 (assassin); 69–70, 73, 99, 274–75 (poems); and 289–95 (rights).



FIG. 1 Image of Wang in Japanese Biography (1942). This illustration is based on the photograph in figure 2, but it depicts Wang in a suit and tie and adds Wang's calligraphy (shown in fig. 3). This context amplifies the text's message of pan-Asianism and undermines its message of Chinese nationalism. Source: Unsigned illustration in Yamanaka Minetarō, *Shin Chūgoku no dai shidōsha*, p. 323. Image courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.



FIG. 2 Wang in His Hankou Studio (1938). This photograph shows Wang in a Chinese robe holding a brush. The signed text notes the date and photographer. Source: Wang Wenxing, photograph, *Minguo* 民國 27.2.26 [26 February 1938]. © The Wang Jingwei Irrevocable Trust. Used with permission.

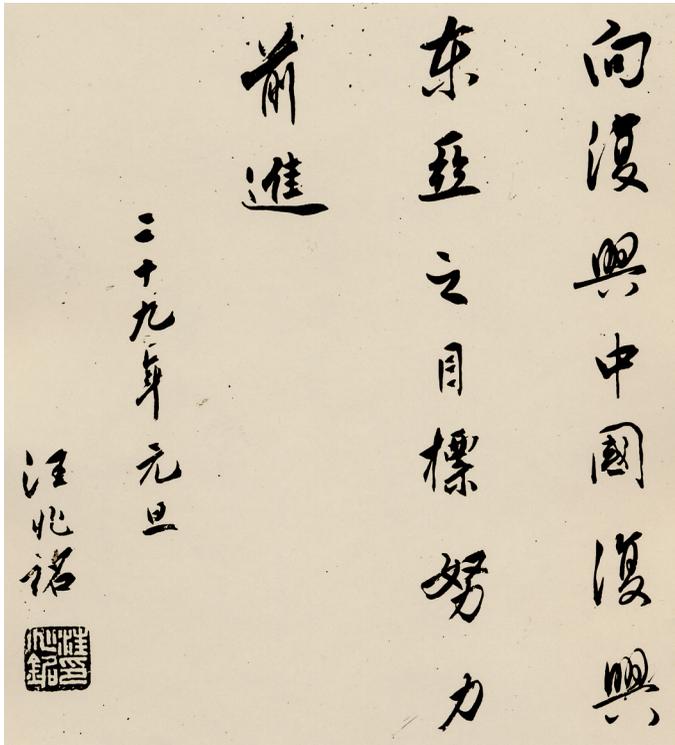


FIG. 3 Wang Jingwei's Calligraphy (1940). Written on the New Year (January 1), this piece shows Wang's wish for the RNG, which was founded a few months later: "Advance, toward the goal of China's renaissance and East Asia's renaissance!" 向復興中國復興東亞之目標努力前進. Source: Wang Jingwei, "Chinese Calligraphy" [1940]; No. G388.010, Gaijin Collection, Nippu Jiji Photograph Archive, <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-njpa-1-1037/>. Courtesy of the Hawai'i Times Photo Archives Foundation.

an ambiguous pan-Asian ethnicity. With that ambiguity the message of pan-Asianism in Wang's calligraphy is amplified and his message of Chinese nationalism undermined.

This projection of Wang as simultaneously a nationalist and, more importantly, a pan-Asianist represented official Japanese discourse about him, which continued even after his 1944 death. Prime Minister Koiso Kuniaki's 小磯國昭 (1880–1950) press release giving notice of Wang's death juxtaposed two periods in Wang's life: his early days as a young revolutionary and his later "courageous" collaboration.¹⁰³ Koiso

¹⁰³ Koiso Kuniaki, "Ō Seiei seikyo ni saishi danwa" 汪精衛逝去に際し談話, in *Koiso naikaku sōri daijin kunji enzetsu shū* 小磯内閣総理大臣訓示演説集, pp. 88–89 [Showa 昭

says that as head of the RNG, Wang accomplished two great deeds. Domestically, he annulled the unequal treaties and restored Chinese rights in the once semicolonial treaty ports, and internationally, he made China Japan's partner in an East Asian renaissance. The consensus on Wang Jingwei among Japanese military and civil officials (at least in their major public announcements) suggests their universal conviction of Wang's goodwill toward Japan, despite his history as a Chinese patriot. Indeed, his record as a revolutionary assassin was celebrated as proof of his worth. Moreover, Japanese officials apparently never suspected that Wang might again be playing a diplomat-assassin, as hinted in the 1942 poetry exchange on *Bidding Farewell at River Yi*.

Wang certainly calculated his Japanese patrons among the readers of his poetry, a fact that he exploited to gain a cultural edge. He routinely sent his poetry anthology to Japanese statesmen as a gift, and he composed poems for Japanese statesmen on official visits.¹⁰⁴ The poems Wang wrote between 1930 and 1941 were first anthologized and published by a Japanese admirer—the journalist Kurone Shōsaku 黒根祥作 (fl. 1940s), working for *Asahi Shinbun* 朝日新聞 (The Asahi news) at Beijing. It is thus reasonable to assume that Wang expected all his published poems would be read by Japanese.

One possible explanation to account for this apparent discrepancy between the explicit message of Wang as an assassin and the Japanese trust in his motivation lies in the ambivalent nature of allusions—which are open to multiple dimensions of exegesis. The painting by Gao Qifeng was completed decades before the 1942 poetry exchanges and moreover referred to Wang Jingwei as a young assassin in 1910. If the comparison between Jing Ke and Wang Jingwei stops in 1910 and is not extended to the WWII context, then reevoking Wang's iconography as an assassin in 1942 could be seen as legitimizing the RNG as the true

和 19 (1944)]; MS no. 資 00294100-012, National Archives of Japan, Tokyo, <https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/das/image/M000000000000326170>.

¹⁰⁴ In Wang's posthumous anthology only one such poem is extant, addressing the Japanese ambassador to Nanjing, Shigemitsu Mamoru 重光葵 (1887–1957); see Wang Jingwei, "Chongguang dashi zhuti Santan yingyue tu juan" 重光大使屬題三潭映月圖卷, in *Shuangzhaolou shici gao*, pp. 328–29. I have, however, in my own possession a poetry scroll that Wang wrote for the senior Japanese statesman Nobuaki Makino 牧野伸顯 (1861–1949), bearing a couplet not found in any written record. I thus suspect that there are more such social poems left unanthologized.

successor of the Chinese nationalist revolution. If Wang's Japanese patrons took this interpretation, they probably understood the poems of the 1942 exchanges as serving their propagandist cause.

Jing Ke's hidden dagger, invoked by the poems, offers a particularly strong contrast to the perceived candidness of Wang Jingwei's collaboration in his Japanese supporters' eyes. We may ask: Who was seeing (or telling) the truth? If Wang was the new Jing Ke, where was his dagger? Was there a dagger at all, hidden at the end of the proverbial Dugang map, an illusory ownership over large swaths of foreign land to be conquered? Or perhaps, was the impression that there was no dagger precisely the point, since such manifested sincerity might disarm the invader and turn it into a merciful moral power? Perhaps the ultimate "assassination" was to win the heart and mind of the conqueror? In that case, the lack of a dagger is itself precisely the "dagger."

The premise of such an interpretation, however, is that Japan shared the same (classical) language, culture, and moral philosophy. The vision of deploying such a lyric weapon would work by reaffirming the same-script, same-race rhetoric of pan-Asianism, deepening the ambivalence of the collaborators' vain gestures of protests. We may never know the truth. After all, Wang failed, just as Jing Ke did. And by offering this sophisticated, philosophical argument, we have forgotten Ren Yuandao, the original instigator of the poetic exchange.

Ren Yuandao's Strategy

By collecting colophons and presenting Wang with the Guo Qifeng painting, a painting that was special to Wang, Ren Yuandao did seem to have an agenda in mind, though exactly what it was he never revealed. A poet himself, he did not even join the exchange by writing a poem, a reticence that appears most unusual. His postwar recollections, however, help to cast light on his motivations in instigating the exchange in early 1942. Furthermore, by reusing the same set of discursive codes referring to China's cultural memory of noble assassination, Ren's recollections offer yet a new interpretation of Wang Jingwei's iconography, legitimating therefore not only Ren's joining the RNG but also his betrayal of it.

Ren Yuandao was a survival artist who escaped the Armageddon of the RNG's downfall unscathed. Wang died in 1944, and Liang

Hongzhi was executed in November 1946. The others, haunted and disgraced, lived out their lives quietly. Ren Yuandao, however, never faced indictment. He commanded the RNG troops around Nanjing, so his contacts with Chongqing meant that after Japan's surrender, he was appointed Commander of the Vanguard for the Nanjing-Jiangsu-Shanghai region (Nanjing xianqianjun siling 南京先遣軍司令). He was to use RNG troops and its police force to prevent a Communist take-over before GMD troops could be moved into these formerly occupied areas. Part of Ren's job was to turn over his former RNG colleagues, which Ren executed with exceptional efficiency and ruthlessness.¹⁰⁵ He remained a GMD general through the civil war (1945–1949), escaped to Hong Kong ahead of the Peoples' Liberation Army, and died in Canada in 1980.

Considering that Ren Yuandao played his cards so well, especially the trump card of retaining control of RNG troops, we may suspect that his presenting the painting to Wang Jingwei was indeed a strategic move related to his hidden agenda. By August 1945 when Japan surrendered, the RNG had more than six hundred thousand troops to mobilize. If Wang had been alive at that time, he would have had options. He could, for instance, have negotiated with Chongqing for amnesty for all collaborators. Or he might have struck at Japan before the war ended—revealing the proverbial dagger at the end of the scroll. But Wang was incapacitated from March 1944 until his death in November; he was in Japan for medical treatment necessitated by a bullet left from a 1935 assassination attempt. Any plot that Wang might have schemed—with or without Ren Yuandao—could not materialize.

In postwar Hong Kong, Ren recollected and versified. He serialized more than sixty lyric poems to the tune of “A Partridge Sky” (“Zhegu tian” 鷓鴣天) in the journal *Observatory* (Tianwentai 天文臺), all concerning people or events in the “lost” China.¹⁰⁶ About his fellow collaborators, however, he wrote only five poems, all of which refer to Wang Jingwei's relationship to Hu Hanmin (who died in 1936). In these poems, Ren styles himself as an unapologetic admirer of Wang. His exposition following the first poem in this series recounts Wang's 1910 assassination attempt and describes Wang:

¹⁰⁵ Jin Xiongbai, *Wang Zhengquan de kaichang yu shouchang*, v. 2, pp. 27–28.

¹⁰⁶ The serialization of the poems started in 1953; see Ren's prefaces to *Zhegu yijiu ci*, p. 1.

Wang was tall and stood straight, fair as fine jade, just as Sima Qian described [Zhang Liang]—his appearance resembled that of a beautiful young woman. In his dealing with people, [Wang] was gentle and courteous to a fault, but in effect he was quite stubborn inside. His speeches were extremely inflammatory. Even for a speech of over ten thousand words in length, he never needed a draft. This author [Ren himself] thinks that Wang was a quintessential martyr because for over three decades, he engaged in politics in the merciful, selfless, and daring fashion of a martyr. Despite his best intentions, the world ended up feeling sorry for him.

汪長身玉立，美如冠玉，真史遷所謂狀貌如婦人好女。待人接物，外表雖極和悅，然內心亦頗固執，言論富煽動性，數萬字之講演詞，從不起稿。論者謂汪具有烈士典型，三十餘年始終以悲天憫人、奮不顧身、勇往直前之烈士風格，從事政治，雖其用心良苦，終不免為世惋惜。¹⁰⁷

Ren's reference to Wang as a martyr "for over three decades" is provocative. It hints of Wang's potential that despite the best intentions never materialized.

Ren Yuandao's comparison of Wang Jingwei to Zhang Liang—and not Jing Ke—is notable.¹⁰⁸ Ren elaborates that, just as Zhang Liang's assassination attempt marked the first crack in Qin's rule, Wang Jingwei's 1910 attempt marked the crack in the Qing's rule.¹⁰⁹ But by the time that Ren wrote his recollections, he had shifted to using the Qing as a reference to the PRC.¹¹⁰ Thus for Ren, Wang seemed to become in retrospect an assassin not against Japan but against the eventual Communist unification of China. Did Ren (and perhaps Chongqing) think that Wang could have prevented a CCP victory if he had lived to see Japan surrender? Ren's reluctance to make a comparison between Wang and Jing Ke may indicate wishful thinking about the PRC's duration. Other factors notwithstanding, it could have been for the same reason that he did not join the exchange in 1942—simply put, Jing Ke was inauspicious. Jing Ke and all his associates died, and his coun-

¹⁰⁷ Ren Yuandao, narrative note following "Ti Wang Hu shoushu shici xiaojian" 題汪胡手書詩詞小簡, no. 1, in *Zhegu yijiu ci*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Ren Yuandao, *Zhegu yijiu ci*, pp. 25, 29.

¹⁰⁹ Ren Yuandao, *Zhegu yijiu ci*, p. 29.

¹¹⁰ Ren Yuandao, "Kaipianci" 開篇詞, in *Zhegu yijiu ci*, p. 1.

try (Yan) was conquered. Ironically, Wang and the RNG experienced exactly the same outcome.

Martyrdom as a Floating Symbol

The case of Jing Ke illustrates the mobility and adaptability of cultural memory. Through its constant reincarnations and actualizations, Jing Ke's iconography furnishes Chinese cultural memory a rich spectrum of signifiers, offering numerous exegetical possibilities. When the imprisoned twenty-seven-year-old Wang Jingwei identified himself with Jing Ke in 1910, he interpreted his personal life in this cultural hero's trajectory of destiny. And he subsequently sought to live out this destiny as his own. As Jing Ke's nobility was elevated to an impossible height of heroism through retelling and rewriting, particularly during the turbulent years at the end of the Qing, his mythologized heroism would always be too great a suit for Wang to fill.

During the decades when Wang lived in the public eye as a Republican statesman, his obsession with Jing Ke seemed to have faded, yet in 1942 his previous identification with Jing Ke acquired new meaning. Jing Ke's "martyrdom" became a rich, ambivalent, floating symbol that could be, and was, appropriated to justify various, sometimes conflicting, interests: for Wang himself, for his followers, and for his Japanese patrons. For Wang, the meaning of martyrdom was supreme sacrifice—not just of his life, but also of his reputation (including even his posthumous reputation). His followers stressed instead the valiant act of past and implied future assassination, a desperate method which, if successful, could bring them the silver hope of salvation. Wang's Japanese patrons, however, approved only the altruistic aspect of Wang's iconography, seeing his credentials as political capital that validated his collaboration as patriotic and their occupation as benign. For the survivor Ren Yuandao, by glorifying Wang Jingwei's moral image, he sought his own personal redemption—a redemption that he denied his fellow collaborators, first by hunting them down in 1946 Nanjing, then by rewriting his own memory in postwar Hong Kong.

Despite—or perhaps precisely because of—its power to serve all these conflicting needs, the iconography of Wang Jingwei as poet and martyr has gained greater currency in recent decades. Today, scholars

seeking to overturn the mainstream historiography of Wang as a traitor continue to describe Wang's motivation to collaborate as driven by a "martyr complex" (*lieshi qingjie* 烈士情結).¹¹¹ This term is borrowed from Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), a famous liberal scholar, who used it sympathetically in his diary upon hearing the news of Wang's death.¹¹²

The poetry exchange published in February 1942 was one of many that characterized the cultural life of occupied Nanjing. It was a special cultural habitat distinctive from other contemporaneous collaborative establishments for its elitist pedigree and moralistic self-claim. A poetic exchange suggests that the poets speak within the same reference system, and anyone who takes the hermeneutic effort to enter their sanctum of esoteric meaning may incline to share their sentiment, because in saying the shibboleth one begins to feel partial to their game. Those who understand each other by referring to such a shared repertoire of cultural memories also share a sense of belonging and destiny. Through refined aesthetic delights in painting, calligraphy, and poetry exchange, the literati around Wang Jingwei forged a special kind of RNG cultural identity that carried political functions. These cultural practices harked back to the classical ideal of meritocracy and moral integrity, when an elite versed in the Confucian canon, poetry, and fine arts became by default the ruling class. Wang Jingwei's charisma resided in his bearing, eloquence, cultural pedigree, and a cultivated image of moral purity; it provided a strong binding force for the selective membership of his followers, admirers, and sympathizers. In the same achievements lay the root of his failure to become a modern politician playing a war game of guns, money, calculation, and mass mobilization. Perhaps exactly because of the RNG's impotence to rally popular support through cohesive modern ideologies, such as nationalism and communism, their adherence to a model of traditional authority was particularly significant.

Furthermore, using cultural memory as a legitimating discourse also played into Japan's pan-Asianist strategy. As the title of the journal *Accord* suggests, China and Japan shared the same classical written

¹¹¹ See, for instance, Yeh Chia-ying, "Wang Jingwei shici zhong de *Jingwei qingjie*" 汪精衛詩詞中的「精衛情結」, *Yinke wenxue shenghuo zhi* 印刻文學生活誌 no. 67 (March 2009): 104–17.

¹¹² See the entry for November 13, 1944, in *Hu Shi riji quanbian* 胡適日記全編, ed. Cao Boyan 曹伯言, 10 vols. (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), v. 7, p. 563.

language. If the RNG poets used this language to evoke the warm feeling of friendship between the countries, their very success also lent credibility to Japan's same-script, same-race propaganda. It did not matter that Japan strengthened itself through embracing Western-style modernity. Nor was it a concern that whatever commonality existed in Japan's and China's respective histories centered on Chinese values. The universalist aspect of the Confucian tradition dictates that whoever personifies moral authority and cultural achievements becomes the true king.¹¹³ As such, it is a doctrine that is alien to the modern divisions of nation or race. In this way, Japan could comfortably claim the mantle of "Middle Kingdom," the new center of the traditionally Sinocentric Confucian East Asia.

Werner Rings, when chronicling life in Hitler's Europe, draws a picture of collaboration and resistance not as polar opposites but as the ends of a continuum with varying shades of gray. Collaboration could be identified as neutral (to secure survival), unconditioned (in total solidarity with the occupation force, or "collaborationist" in Bertram Gordon's terms), conditioned (without subscription to the occupation force's ideological agenda), or tactical.¹¹⁴ The tactical collaborator opposed Nazi ideology and the Third Reich but saw collaboration as a necessary means to realize larger goals of resistance. We might call this tactical approach *resistance through collaboration*.

But if we take Wang Jingwei and some of his followers' repeated statements throughout the period of collaboration literally and ironically, they seem to have been advocating an idea of *collaboration as resistance*—namely, collaborating with Japan to save Japan from itself, to dissuade Japan from waging a self-destructive war with China, and to convince Japan that peace was in the best interests of both nations. Wang and his followers thus could even be considered ideological collaborationists, not mere tactical collaborators—in the sense that they agreed with Japan's professed goal of pan-Asianism as an anti-Western imperialist agenda.¹¹⁵ By agreeing with Japan's lofty aspiration, however,

¹¹³ On Japan's adoption of Sun Yat-sen's "kingly way" rhetoric, see Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War 1931–1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 59, 117–31.

¹¹⁴ Werner Rings, *Leben mit dem Feind: Anpassung und Widerstand in Hitlers Europa, 1939–1945* (Munich: Kindler, 1979), p. 197.

¹¹⁵ Cf. John Hunter Boyle, *China and Japan at War 1937–1945: The Politics of Collaboration* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 6.

they also subtly dissented from Japan's imperialist conquest that was the ugly reality.

In their postwar trials, however, the chief collaborators themselves rejected such an unironic understanding of their wartime statements. They asserted instead that their collaboration belonged to the "tactical" variant—namely, resistance through collaboration.¹¹⁶ Unsympathetic judges—including both those who presided over the postwar traitor trials and Chinese mainstream historiographers today—dismiss their apologies as self-serving and characterize their actions as barely rising above the level of "selling the nation" (*maiguo* 賣國) for a profit. Of course, there is also a possibility that their motivations were mixed and thus that both the charges and their defenses were simultaneously true to some extent. In this view, Wang's collaboration can be seen as both tactical, serving China's resistance, and sincere, hoping Japan's anti-imperialist agenda would succeed.¹¹⁷

It is exactly in such profound ambivalence that the comparison of Wang Jingwei to Jing Ke appears particularly biting—even to the collaborators themselves. Qin, the despotic hegemon, laid the institutional foundation for the structure of the subsequent Chinese bureaucratic empire. Jing Ke, despite his valiance, also symbolized the military weakness and strategic recklessness of the conquered states, whose downfall in a social Darwinist sense was entirely deserved. Analogously, Wang Jingwei's collaboration, brave though it might have been, was ill conceived, poorly executed, and disastrous for himself as well as for his associates. His romantic image was jarringly disconnected from his regime that asked its people to accept the distasteful reality of conquest.¹¹⁸ Wang's actions failed, regardless of whether his proverbial dagger was meant to stab Japan militarily in its back, as Ren Yuandao's involvement might suggest, or meant to remove Japan's

¹¹⁶ See, for instance, the apologies of Chen Gongbo 陳公博 (1892–1946) and Zhou Fohai 周佛海 (1897–1948) in *Shenxun Wang wei hanjian bilu*, v. 1, pp. 2–38, 43–58, 92–108; Charles Musgrove, "Cheering the Traitor: The Post-War Trial of Chen Bijun, April 1946," *Twentieth-Century China* 30.2 (2005): 3–27.

¹¹⁷ Kameda Hisao 亀田壽夫, 'Ō Chōmei seiken' no kenshō: Sono haigo no shisō tetsugaku 「汪兆銘政權」の検証: その背後の思想哲学 (Tokyo: Sanshō shuppansha, 2015), pp. 19–20; Howard Boorman, "Wang Ching-wei: A Political Profile," in *Revolutionary Leaders of Modern China*, ed. Chün-tu Hsüeh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 317–18.

¹¹⁸ Wang was "a political romantic" and made a "claim to realism"; Boorman, "Wang Ching-wei," p. 296. Wang's propaganda department called for "militant realism"; Poshek Fu, *Passivity*, p. 127.

aggressive gene, as Long Yusheng implied in his introduction to *Accord*. Yet through poetry, Wang and his associates have been redeemed at least partially in the eyes of sympathetic readers and scholars. The erudite historical references of Wang and his associates lend their collaboration a meaning constructed diachronically through time. Their connection of Wang to Jing Ke raises possibilities of debate and reconsideration. In this sense, just as Jing Ke's failure was transformed into a posthumous victory, perhaps Wang's may be as well.