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# Provincial Identity in China: Thinking Central-Local Relations in Guangdong, 1870-1911

Chan, Ying-kit

Princeton, NJ : Princeton University

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**Provincial Identity in China:  
Thinking Central-Local Relations in Guangdong, 1870-1910**

Ying-kit Chan

A DISSERTATION  
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
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OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation investigates Chinese impressions of Guangdong, the southernmost province of the Qing Empire (1644-1912), as an administrative or territorial unit, as a political concept, and, most importantly, as a source of identity. It interprets autobiographies, biographies, poems, literary letters, and political treatises as expressions of a new provincial identity informed by imperial decline, foreign ideas, and transcultural exchanges. By the beginning of the twentieth century, long before Guangdong would experiment with capitalism and economic decentralization in the 1980s and 1990s, its literati were already grappling with the issues of local autonomy, state control, and self-representation.

By examining the writings of five literati who experienced China's tumultuous transition from empire to nation—He Ruzhang 何如璋 (1838-1891), Deng Chengxiu 鄧承修 (1841-1892), Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864-1912), Ou Jujia 歐桀甲 (1870-1911), and Liang Jushi 梁居實 (1843-1911)—this dissertation explores the historical context of the autonomy of contemporary Chinese provinces. It suggests that narrating a history of provincial identity and central-local relations outside the purview of statist and nation-centric perspectives can infuse fresh insights into tired historiographical and political credos about reform and revolution as well as provide an example that would supplement studies of nationalism of other parts of the world.

Created in its current form during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties, Guangdong has developed a life of its own. It represents a locus for identity that is simultaneously cultural, ethnic, political, and personal. This dissertation thus focuses less on textual representations than on the personal inventions of provincial identity by selected Guangdong literati. Although marginal to the dominant discourses on state-oriented reform and revolution of their day, the vision of Chinese provincialism articulated by these literati accompanied the rise of ethnic Han nationalism. Through them, this dissertation explores the provincial roots of China's national identity. It demonstrates how provincialism was fused with nationalist ideas in the late Qing Empire and has continued to influence debates on culture, history, and statecraft in contemporary China.

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation was inspired by my being a third-generation Cantonese Singaporean. I thought I would enjoy an advantage by being able to read the literature of vernacular Cantonese, which has been the majority language in Guangdong for centuries. In the end, however, the Guangdong literati with whom I chose to engage left far more classical Chinese writings than vernacular Cantonese ones; most of those literati were, in fact, Hakka. The integration of diverse Guangdong into equally diverse China thus appeared somewhat complete. My initial research questions were deceptively simple: Why was Guangdong part of a new Chinese nation after the collapse of the Qing Empire, when it had every opportunity to secede from China for good? How did the literati reconcile their provincial and national identities, and how did they explain the similarities and differences?

I suppose I have yet to provide entirely satisfactory answers to these questions; my dissertation was completed in a bit of a haste as I gleefully prepared to become a postdoctoral fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden University. It goes without saying, therefore, that I bear ultimate responsibility for all the flaws, mistakes, and typos that the reader might unfortunately encounter. For the redeeming features of this dissertation, and for helping me answer my own questions about Guangdong, Benjamin A. Elman deserves the fullest credit. Under his able and patient guidance, I have enjoyed the freedom to explore an eclectic mix of topics from Cixi to pawnbroking and finally to

provincialism. Behind his blunt and highly critical comments lies a genuine concern for my intellectual development. For this, I am sincerely grateful.

At Princeton, He Bian and Nicola di Cosmo made me fall deeper in love with Qing China. Janet Y. Chen convinced me of the continuity between the Qing and Republican periods. David Cannadine, Linda Colley, and Jeremy Adelman opened up the world, quite literally, with their courses on global history. Sir Cannadine warrants an extra note for making sure that I truly understood global history in the general examinations. Stephen Kotkin forced me to remember the importance of agency, power, and structure in history, while Federico Marcon forgot that he screened me at the admissions interview. Sue Naquin continues to take an interest in my work, and her candid comments on my prospectus and dissertation will be missed. Buzzy Teiser not only taught me about Chinese religion but also, with Richard Chafey, funded my conference trips through the East Asian Studies Program. Without Margo Orlando, I could not have submitted my dissertation, scheduled my defense, and graduated on time. Amber Lee and Chao-Hui Jenny Liu helped with everything else. Meghan Krause eased my burden by ensuring that I received the full allowable financial support from the university. Martin Heijdra was indispensable at the Gest Library. The professional Firestone librarians were overwhelmed by thousands of my Borrow Direct requests and Interlibrary loans, but their helpfulness never faltered. Willard Peterson saved me in the nick of time by agreeing to sit on my dissertation committee at extremely short notice.

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Without the support of the National University of Singapore (NUS), my alma mater, I would never have made it this far. Koh Khee Heong, Ong Chang Woei, and Yung Sai-shing wrote my letters of recommendation. Su Jui-lung offered excellent career advice. Kenneth Dean has been a supportive head of department. Kang Ger-wen is a beloved friend and senior. Jack Meng-Tat Chia is nearby whenever I need help. Quite simply, without Lee Cheuk Yin, there is no Ying-kit Chan. He has given me so much that I could barely repay his care and kindness. I am forever indebted to him. Fong Mui Sin, Celeste Tay, Tang Ily, Ellie Thong, and Angeline Wee are my administrative links to NUS.

In Europe, Elisabeth Kaske served as reader and examiner of my dissertation. Philippe Peycam and Willem Vogelsang welcomed me into IIAS with open arms. Harriet Zurndorfer widened the entrance to Leiden by inviting me to serve as editorial assistant for *NAN NÜ: Men, Women and Gender in China*. Albert Hoffstädt and Chunyan Shu of Brill confirmed that my move to Leiden was wise. Michael Montesano was the first to suggest that I consider



Leiden and introduced me to Philippe. Henrietta Harrison and Tian Yuan Tan are reasons why I wavered and thought about going to Britain instead.

Elsewhere, May-bo Ching and Liu Zhiwei supplied the letters to archives in Guangdong. Huang Aiping secured my access to the First Historical Archives of China. Engseng Ho was sheer fun in Zanzibar and Durham. Cynthia Brokaw, Lai Chi-tim, Stephen R. Platt, and Shuk-wah Poon encouraged me in my early years of graduate school. Thomas H. Reilly told me where to look for missionary sources. Kornphanat Tungkeunkant hosted me at Thammasat University. Fei Chen, Chang Yau (CY) Hoon, Egas Moniz-Bandeira, and Isaac C. K. Tan are wonderful peers and regular collaborators. Hyeju Janice Jeong and I wrote our dissertations at cat cafes in Taipei. Chan Tian How, Raymond Kwan, and Lin Peiyu helped run my errands in Singapore. Alison So was my landlord in Hong Kong. Special thanks are due to Chua Kah Hau, who pushed me to pursue a doctoral degree, signed my surety forms, and visited me in Bangkok and Kyoto.

The Center for Chinese Studies, ROC (Taiwan), and the Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, funded part of my research. NUS generously subsidized my education through its Overseas Graduate Scholarship. My sponsors might be happy to know that several chapters of this dissertation have already been revised and published in various journals: Chapter one as “Diplomacy and the Appointment of Officials in Late Qing China: He Ruzhang and Japan’s Annexation of Ryukyu” in *The Chinese Historical Review* 26, no. 1

(2019): 20–36; chapter two as “The Odyssey of a Guangdong Official: Deng Chengxiu and Late Qing Political Culture” in *Journal of Asian History* 52, no. 2 (2018): 259–286; chapter three as “Proto-Nationalism and Remembering Taiwan: Qiu Fengjia (1864–1912) and Modern Education in Late Qing Guangdong” in *Archiv orientální* 87, no. 1 (2019): 175–206; chapter four as “Divide to Unite: Ou Jujia, *New Guangdong*, and Provincial Consciousness in 1900s China” in *Journal of World History* 29, no. 4 (2018): 481–505; and chapter five as “The Root of All Things: Liang Jushi and Practical Enterprise in Late Qing China” in *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 19, no. 1 (2019): 37–58. I thank the editors of the aforementioned journals for granting me permission to use previously published materials. Chapter four had been presented as “Ou Jujia and Provincial Consciousness in 1900s China” at the Center for Chinese Studies, where attendees and fellow panelists had provided feedback that improved the paper.

My family did not understand why I wanted to study Chinese history in the United States rather than in China, but they unconditionally suffered my prolonged absence and gave me their love and understanding. My grandmother Chan Leng Mui and father, Chan Chin Chiong, did not live to see this dissertation. My elder sister, Pui San, has been taking care of my mother, Chew Mee Yuen, as well as of things big and small at home throughout the years. Across the Pacific, Sheryl Man-Ying Chow has been taking care of me. To them, I dedicate this dissertation, which possesses little value compared to their sacrifices.

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*Provincial Identity in China:  
Thinking Central-Local Relations in Guangdong, 1870–1910*

**Introduction**

This dissertation is an attempt to push for new directions in the study of nationalism and political identity in China at the turn of the twentieth century during the transition from the last “Empire” to the first “Republic.” The increase in the number of articles and books published since the start of the twenty-first century on Qing-Republican China, or on how the Qing Empire became the Chinese nation that we see today, underscores not only both scholarly and public interest in a rising China but also the extent to which the academe has given the history of Chinese nationalism unprecedented attention in the fields of late imperial China and modern China.<sup>1</sup> This state of affairs stands in marked contrast to the second half of the twentieth century when research on imperial China focused on why it “failed” to modernize quickly like Japan to resist foreign imperialism or why it turned “red” or communist after a series of supposedly “liberal” revolutions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henrietta Harrison, *China: Inventing the Nation* (London: Arnold, 2002); Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Jung Chang, *Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-chih Restoration, 1862–1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957); Albert Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization: Sheng Hsuan-huai (1844–1916) and Mandarin Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958); Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962); Albert Feuerwerker, *The Chinese Economy, 1870–1949* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1995); Mark Selden, *The Yen'an Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Edward Friedman, *National Identity and Democratic Prospects in Socialist China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995); Pauline Keating, *Two Revolutions: Village Reconstruction and the Cooperative Movement in Northern Shaanxi, 1934–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

A crucial reason for the inclusion of nationalism in the consciousness of observers and scholars studying China is the country's devolution of economic and even political power from the central government to the provincial authorities as a result of post-Mao reforms. Contrary to what critics of China's perceived authoritarianism and human rights record have suggested, provincial governments enjoy a fair degree of autonomy in directing economic projects and retain significant political agency—a logical outcome for the overstretched Chinese state. Political scientist Zheng Yongnian has called this political arrangement, or tacit consensus of rule, “de facto federalism,” in which Chinese provinces act or behave like federal states similar to those of the United States and elsewhere and can even dispute or overrule the central government's decisions.<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation historicizes the autonomy of Chinese provinces by examining the writings of literati who experienced China's tumultuous transition from empire to nation during the late Qing period (c. 1870–1910). By focusing on Guangdong, the province that was first opened up to capitalism and foreign investment as part of the post-Mao economic reforms, the dissertation argues that late Qing Guangdong literati had already struggled with issues of state power and control of the provinces. Guangdong entered the twentieth century as an already partitioned province. Parts of it were ceded or leased to foreign powers as a result of Qing China's military defeats and “unequal treaties,” which saw the Manchu

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<sup>3</sup> Zheng Yongnian, *De Facto Federalism in China: Reforms and Dynamics of Central-Local Relations* (Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 2007).

imperial court surrender its sovereignty over “Chinese” territories and “national” rights to economic control and legal persecution at the expense of “Chinese” interests. The resurfacing of ethnic tensions between the Manchu and Han peoples and the introduction of a new diplomatic language based on international law, provided the literati with updated perspectives and political vocabulary through which to define “China” and articulate their thoughts about the “Chinese” nation.<sup>4</sup>

Normally, literati patriots such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao have been viewed as the first wave of political change in late imperial Guangdong. Through the biographies and experiences of five more representative Guangdong literati—He Ruzhang 何如璋 (1838–1891), Deng Chengxiu 鄧承修 (1841–1892), Ou Jujia 歐榘甲 (1870–1911), Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912), and Liang Jushi 梁居實 (1843–1911), this dissertation highlights the broader transition of a coterie of Guangdong literati from national to provincial elites and suggests that education, federalism, and industry, rather than reform and revolution, served as the grammar of both national and personal transitions in late Qing China. Melding narrative history and political philosophy, this dissertation on provincially based and provincially minded Guangdong literati at the turn of the twentieth century examines the articulations of what will be referred to as “non-statism.” Non-statism departs from the view that the state, as

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<sup>4</sup> Dong Wang, *China's Unequal Treaties: Narrating National History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005); Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861–1928* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

a set of institutions of rule, is “the ultimate locus of sovereignty, self-legitimizing, and the highest source of good.”<sup>5</sup> Reforms, revolutions, and state projects were indispensable in transforming the Chinese from “peasants to [Chinese]men.”<sup>6</sup> However, they inform us less about the nature of national identity than delineate the “mental paths” leading outward from the true homeland of local places where one was born or raised.<sup>7</sup>

Like the French and Germans, the Chinese, at least in Guangdong, attained a sense of national unity much later than is commonly supposed.<sup>8</sup> Unknown to most historians, some Guangdong literati had tried to cultivate a love for their province among fellow provincials to establish an abstract nationalism based on attachment to hometowns or perceived ancestral origins and to reconcile the modern, imperialized world with local ideas, practices, and interests. Amid the existing scholarly literature dominated by well-known literati such as Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–1898), and Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1868–1936),<sup>9</sup> this dissertation illuminates an obscured history of Guangdong and the Chinese nation and argues for a new configuration of

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885–1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>6</sup> The seminal work on such transformation is Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 42.

<sup>8</sup> Harrison, *China: Inventing the Nation*.

<sup>9</sup> Zarrow, *After Empire*; Lin Yü-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Movement* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979); Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning (1890–1911)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

central-provincial relations rooted in the late Qing-early Republican experience—a timely intervention to better grasp both the political unrest in Tibet, Xinjiang, and other “autonomous regions” and, to a much greater degree, the political imperative for centralized rule to address demands for democratization and balance economic development with the maintenance of power in the provinces.

In recent years, much of the historical scholarship on China has focused on the economic, political, and social transformations that constructed the Chinese nation. This is understandable given the dramatic ways Chinese nationalism has unfolded in recent decades, as suggested by China’s geopolitical conflicts and troubled relations with nations such as Japan and Korea.<sup>10</sup> Nationalism in China has been fused with a sense of humiliation and victimization at the hands of foreign imperialism, such that China must “dream” and “rise” again to regain its status as a global power, which was allegedly lost during the Qing and Republican periods. The preoccupation with the nation in China’s nationalistic politics has obscured the complexity of political discourses that existed in the past.

While historians have arrived at their own conclusions about how different people in different provinces in late Qing China embraced their new Chinese nationality and how they reconstituted or reinforced their ethnicity in response to the political need to homogenize the

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Hays Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the “Rape of Nanking”: History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).



national community, this dissertation suggests that such differing arguments do not indicate a clear shift to a new paradigm in modern Chinese history. Rather, what we are seeing is the interrogation of a new situation with an old question.

Without delving into the mental construction of provinces, the territorial building blocks of the Chinese nation, the history of how China transformed from a multiethnic empire into a purportedly homogeneous republic remains incomplete. Provincial visions of China emphasized ecocultural diversity and defined Chinese identity by local literati rather than prominent reformers, propagandist revolutionaries, and national policymakers. The provincial patriotisms of literati in Guangdong, Hunan,<sup>11</sup> and elsewhere held the Chinese nation together across wars, divisive politics, and severe ideological differences in the twentieth century. The local patriotism of literati and the people whom they influenced suggests that they could embrace a justifiably Chinese provincial identity when the state or the nation that it represented was weak and accept their membership as part of the nation when the state was strong.

### **The Dilemma of Guangdong**

As an administrative and territorial unit, the Chinese province of Guangdong that we see today was demarcated during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). There were changes in the

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen R. Platt, *Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

methods of rule and additions of new provinces such as Zhili 直隸 in the metropolitan region surrounding the capital of Beijing and those in northeastern China as part of the Manchu homeland. But the boundaries of the provinces in the southern half of China, including Guangdong, have remained largely unchanged through the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) to the present.<sup>12</sup> More so than Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and others, a good segment of Guangdong natives, represented by the five literati I describe, began to forge a sense of provincial identity during the late Qing period and strove to connect the process of identity formation without ever declaring their independence from what they perceived to be a Chinese nation. For the Guangdong literati, independence might mean not the creation of a new political community but annexation by a foreign state.

Therefore, this dissertation addresses why the Guangdong literati found the option of annexation by a foreign power undesirable. Guangdong was “civilized,” or became “Han,” only after the Ming dynasty. Given that most Guangdong people as late as the turn of the twentieth century were more likely to identify themselves with their village, town, county, and prefecture,<sup>13</sup> the dissertation examines why, despite the long history of cultural independence and even political self-government, the Guangdong literati rejected the rule of a foreign—excluding Manchu—power and accepted their incorporation into a Han (Chinese)

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<sup>12</sup> R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644–1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Yang Kuisong 楊奎松, “Guizi lai le” “鬼子” 來了 (Devils on the doorstep) (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2016).

nation. It also explores why, despite the emergence among the cultural or educated elite of a provincial identity that implied opposition to the state or national community, Guangdong remained part of the political system that is retrospectively called China.

Such a proposition can be advanced because the collapse of the Qing Empire, at least in the formerly Ming territories, was essentially if not entirely provincial and sprang from economic and ethnic sources rather than from radical reforms, revolutionary ideas, or any deep political difference between provincials and the Manchu state.<sup>14</sup> Although elite transformation from scholar-officials (He Ruzhang and Deng Chengxiu) to provincial elites (Ou Jujia, Qiu Fengjia, and Liang Jushi) played an important role in the Guangdong literati's prioritizing of local interests over national concerns,<sup>15</sup> the ultimate failure of the Qing state to exert—rather than diminish—control of the provinces to the satisfaction of the provincial elites resulted in its own demise. The desire for a strong state that could defend their province against economic imperialism and territorial partition forced the Guangdong literati to

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph W. Esherick, "How the Qing Became China," in *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, eds. Joseph W. Esherick, Hashan Kayali, and Eric Van Young (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 229–259; En-han Lee, *China's Quest for Railway Autonomy, 1904–1911: A Study of the Chinese Railway-Rights Recovery Movement* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1977); Mary Backus Rankin, "Nationalistic Contestation and Mobilization Politics: Practice and Rhetoric of Railway-Rights Recovery at the End of the Qing," *Modern China* 28, no. 3 (2002): 315–361; Xiaowei Zheng, *The Politics of Rights and the 1911 Revolution in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017). These works have illuminated how disputes between the state and the people over economic and political rights had resulted in the collapse of the Qing dynasty. However, unlike this dissertation, they do not adequately address how these rights might be fused with provincial identity and became provincial rights.

<sup>15</sup> R. Keith Schoppa, *Chinese Elites and Political Change: Zhejiang Province in the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Mary Backus Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); Marianne Bastid, *Educational Reform in Early Twentieth Century China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1988); Platt, *Provincial Patriots*.

contemplate non-statist solutions that could at least resolve the provincial if not national crises. Provincialism could be a recipe for separatism as much as a blueprint for conciliation, pluralism, and nationhood, depending on how it is interpreted. The threat of foreign imperialism had thus inadvertently kept China territorially intact after the collapse of the Qing Empire.

### **The Guangdong Literati**

Popularly hailed as “the cradle of revolution” that produced the most famous reformers and revolutionaries of the late Qing period,<sup>16</sup> Guangdong as a province was heavily exposed to foreign influences. The port city of Guangzhou, the provincial capital, had long been a preeminent hub for intra-riverine and international trade in the Pearl River Delta basin and the coasts of the South China Sea. It gained greater prominence during the Qing dynasty, when the imperial state developed the semi-official Canton System through which all foreign merchants uninvolved in tributary missions dealt with Chinese counterparts.<sup>17</sup> The people of Guangdong capitalized on its trading infrastructure of canals, roads, and human connections to migrate upstream to the hinterland, Southeast Asia, or Taiwan, the last of which was conquered by the Manchus in 1683 and henceforth colonized by the Han. After the

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900–1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> See Paul A. Van Dyke’s monographs, most notably his *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: HKU Press, 2005).

First Opium War (1839–1842), a substantial number of Guangdong people sojourned or settled not only in Southeast Asia but also in North America, where they helped open up frontiers and establish American and European overseas colonies.<sup>18</sup>

The people of Guangdong did not constitute an undifferentiated whole. This dissertation uses “literati” to translate the traditional class of *shi* 士 or *shiren* 士人 even though China historians have deployed other terms such as “gentry-merchants,” “scholars,” and “scholar-officials” to highlight the different characteristics of the *shi* in their respective studies. The literati scrutinized in this dissertation qualified as *shi* because they produced “culture” (*wen* 文) or texts such as poems, prose, and literary letters, on which the dissertation is based; attempted or passed the civil examinations and held degrees and/or office; and led communities in developing culture, education, and industry.

“Gentry-merchants,” which generally refers to the merger of economic, especially landed wealth, and social resources in individuals, does not apply to these literati, who were not landowners or merchants; neither were their clans or families. In many ways, then, they

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<sup>18</sup> Steven B. Miles, *Upriver Journeys: Diaspora and Empire in Southern China, 1570–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2017); Emma Jinhua Teng, *Taiwan’s Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683–1895* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: HKU Press, 2013); Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

barely qualified as “elites” and had not developed elite strategies or discernable patterns of dominance that excluded possible contenders for their social status.<sup>19</sup>

Such patterns or strategies were subject to regional variations. In Guangdong, most elites were gentry-merchants by virtue of their mobile rather than landed wealth, and so two types of leaders existed: the literati, who guided cultural developments and substantiated the notion of “Guangdong-ness,”<sup>20</sup> and the overseas and/or locally based merchants, who traded extensively with fellow provincials in Nanyang or Southeast Asia. Due to a lack of economic resources, the “Guangdong literati,” defined as registered natives or those whose ancestors originated in the province, required the material support of merchants for their activities, regardless of their motivation or political agenda.

Contrary to the image that China historians have long projected, only a handful of Qing literati actually studied the ideas of citizenship, nationhood, sovereignty, and the like, and even fewer had their ideas analyzed or explained in the existing historical scholarship. This dissertation does not focus on the conceptual transformation of the state by the so-called paragons of modern Chinese thought such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao as identified by

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin, eds., *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> Cheng Meibao 程美寶, *Diyu wenhua yu guojia rentong: wan Qing yilai “Guangdong wenhua” guan de xingcheng* 地域文化與國家認同：晚清以來 “廣東文化” 觀的形成 (Regional culture and national identity: the evolution of the idea of “Guangdong culture” since the late Qing) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2006).

Hao Chang, Wang Hui 汪暉, Peter Zarrow, and others.<sup>21</sup> Rather, it recovers the voices of Guangdong literati who were marginalized by the political discourses of their day and are unrepresented in the historical work of our times.

The privileging or canonization of certain literati at the expense of attention to others stems partly from the binary of reform and revolution held by historians when investigating the transformations of twentieth-century China or its transition from empire to nation. The scholarly turn in recent decades to cultural and social histories has revealed significant dynamics and patterns of change within China that were independent of the so-called impact of the West in the nineteenth century. But most China historians continue to frame their studies in terms of dynastic transitions or parallels with developments in European societies, the archetype of all things modern (that said, Europe was represented by England, France, and/or Germany and not considered as a whole). Supposedly a product of modernity, the nation is prioritized in the historiography of modern China.

Narratives that did not fully subscribe to the notion of a historically bound, continuous, and exceptional (if not primordial) Chinese nation have been suppressed since the late Qing period. Alternative histories that defy the spatial and temporal unities of the Chinese nation have been ignored or neglected. In other words, hegemonic discourses on the nation have emphasized prolific, nationally minded literati or political thinkers such as Kang

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<sup>21</sup> Wang Hui, *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi* 現代中國思想的興起 (The rise of modern Chinese thought) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2004).

Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Sun Yat-sen; those who produced few writings (and hence little textual evidence on which scholars can work) and did not represent explicit or radical views on late Qing politics or on reforming or revolutionizing the state have remained obscured or largely forgotten.<sup>22</sup> If central-provincial relations were to be reconfigured, figuratively if not in practice, they must seek inspiration in unlikely places.

This dissertation contends that narrating a history of provincial identity and central-local relations outside the reform-revolution paradigm and nation-centric perspectives will allow us to view it in a new light. From the obscured vista highlighted by this dissertation, we may yet infuse fresh insights into tired historiographical and political credos and better contextualize the scholarship on central-local relations in contemporary China—a domain in which political scientists dominate and historians rarely participate.<sup>23</sup>

### **In Defense of Biographies**

This dissertation balances the macro-histories of economy, politics, and society with micro-narratives of individuals to introduce a human dimension to modern Chinese history. By following a rough chronology from the 1870s to the 1910s, the dissertation offers a focused history of Guangdong and China at the turn of the twentieth century. By examining

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<sup>22</sup> On how a nation-centered perspective has oversimplified history and marginalized other discourses and narratives, see Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Zheng, *De Facto Federalism*; John A. Donaldson, ed., *Assessing the Balance of Power in Central-Local Relations in China* (London: Routledge, 2016); Jae Ho Chung, *Centrifugal Empire: Central-Local Relations in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).



the solutions or views proposed by lesser-known literati, it covers a period of ideological and political experimentation in the wake of crises faced by the Qing Empire: Japan's annexation of Ryukyu, a longtime tributary state of China; France's establishment of a protectorate in Vietnam, another of China's tributary polities; Japan's conquest of Taiwan, a province newly created in the 1870s; the 1900 Boxer Rebellion that resulted in the foreign occupation of Beijing and a scramble for concessions and territories in China; and the devastation of the Manchu homeland by the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), a blow to whatever remained of Qing dignity.

Partition greatly affected Guangdong, which lost more territory to foreign powers than any other province. Guangzhouwan 廣州灣, Hong Kong, Macau, Xin'an 新安, Xiangshan 香山, and towns bordering Vietnam were ceded from Guangdong, and contemporary observers feared that Hainan Island would be next to fall under foreign control. This dissertation begins in the 1870s, when Japan, perceived by the Qing literati as an inferior cultural cousin, began to advance sovereign claims to Ryukyu and Taiwan. Through the lens of the Guangdong literati, the events leading into the Boxer Rebellion, which accentuated not only the Manchu-Han divide but also, as this dissertation suggests, a reconfiguration of central-local relations in Guangdong, are also examined. The story ends in the early 1910s, when centralized state power changed hands and revolutionaries declared the founding of the Republic of China. Despite the warlordism and political chaos that ensued, Guangdong

remained part of the new Chinese republic, and few of its literati had qualms or questions about it. This dissertation suggests that the actions and writings of Guangdong literati foregrounded the integration of Guangdong into a future, Han-dominated nation, given the possible collapse of Manchu rule.

Several themes emerge from the narrative. Each chapter is about a literatus who represents a key tenet of provincial identity in Guangdong. The literatus has been dismissed as a subject of interest since his day based on a caricatured vision of central-local relations that uncritically assumes the inclusion of provinces in the nation and does not rigorously test how such relations might have changed even within the short span of four decades as described in this dissertation. The academies in Guangdong, be they classical or modern, were relatively new, having produced few historically established thinkers with whom the literatus could effectively form an intellectual lineage.<sup>24</sup>

But with or without lineage, the literatus, by virtue of his social status or social expectations of him, had come to terms with the nascent concept of nation by the turn of the twentieth century. Despite the questionable utility of a nation-centered historical perspective, the Qing Empire that ruled what we now call “China” had shaped the historical consciousness

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<sup>24</sup> Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning: Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006). Kang Youwei was one of the few Guangdong literati who could claim an intellectual lineage. He inherited the teachings of what were called New Text Confucianism and refashioned Confucius as a political reformer. See Benjamin A. Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

of those it ruled, including the Guangdong literatus. The literatus was not an ideological hero, ultimately inspiring to his contemporaries and interesting to macro-historians: he proposed a “boring” but practical solution to at least one major issue encountered by his province or nation. Provincialism and nationalism were mutually constitutive, at least in the case of Guangdong. Provincialism and the identity it embodied was an assemblage of ideas, ruling out pithy summaries. This entire dissertation will be an inductive unfolding of Guangdong provincialism via intellectual history and its social contexts, culminating in an a posteriori definition of the concept in the final chapter.

Writing in 2009, historian Lois W. Banner notes that historians have generally regarded biography as an inferior type of history, seeing it as inherently limited because “it involves only one life, derives from a belles-lettres tradition rather than a scientific or sociological one, and is often written by non-academic historians who attract a lot of readers but lack the rigor of Ph.D.-trained scholars.”<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, notwithstanding the literary critique about “the death of the author” and the prevalent view that texts exist as independent entities, biographies emphasize that individuals play roles “scripted primarily by the surrounding culture.” If the individual is a “text” and the surrounding culture, its “context,” then the individual text not only reflects the context but also influences it.<sup>26</sup> The dialectic

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<sup>25</sup> Lois W. Banner, “Biography as History,” *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (2009): 580.

<sup>26</sup> Banner, “Biography as History,” 582.

relationship between individuals and their *umwelt* suggests that studying the life story of an individual is akin to studying the history of a city, province, or state as a means of understanding broad cultural and social phenomena.

As historian Linda Colley has demonstrated with her masterful study of an English woman whose life crossed different cultural and geographical paths, even obscure and seemingly unsophisticated individuals could represent the complexity of experiences and multitude of interests if they left writings—no matter how few—unique in their detail and originality.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, through the eyes of the literati it describes, this dissertation surveys the ambivalent impact of foreign imperialism on Guangdong, which threatened to split the province into colonies or spheres of influence while providing provincials with opportunities to trade, travel, and solicit funds as part of colonial networks. The theme that holds this dissertation together concerns how individuals saw Guangdong vis-à-vis China and Southeast Asia. Ultimately, the dissertation aims to deploy the minutiae of ancestry, family, friendship, and kinship, which biographies reveal, to illuminate the wider experience of dynastic decline and foreign imperialism in late Qing Guangdong.

But the interplay between individual agency and structural developments, or between biography and history, might lead to problems. What if historical writers meant to dissemble and lay false trails? What if they embellished their accounts or exercised self-censorship to

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<sup>27</sup> Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007).

avoid contemporary or posthumous controversy?<sup>28</sup> Yet, biographies can do justice to the complexity of an economic, political, and social system stretching across so large and diverse a region as Guangdong. Biographies thus help circumvent the generalizations that broad historical accounts have made about the historical experience. Just as elites of different provinces could behave dissimilarly under different local circumstances, natives of a single province could act differently despite being from the same province. Biographies become crucial if we are to appreciate the diversity of Guangdong literati.

### **A Working Definition of Provincial Identity**

#### *Some Broad Attributes*

By articulating what provincial identity entailed, literati were its most vocal and powerful bearers. Until introduced to the a posteriori definition of provincial identity in the conclusion, it might be instructive to begin with some broad attributes, which will be nuanced as we progress through the chapters. For some scholars, provincial identity is anathema to national cohesion. Others suggest that provincial identity is an intermediate step that enables the transition from a parochial to a wider identification with the nation.<sup>29</sup> Provincial identity thus appears destructive or incomplete when viewed vis-à-vis the nation.

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<sup>28</sup> Lawrence Goldman, "History and Biography," *Historical Research* 89, no. 245 (2016): 399–411.

<sup>29</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 178.

For a more neutral if not positive assessment of provincial identity, this dissertation argues for the need to dislodge studies on provincial and national identities from the reform-revolution paradigm, which overemphasizes the historical significance of loyalist efforts to preserve the Manchu Qing monarchy and their implied opposite—republican movements that purportedly helped install the modern Chinese state. This paradigm embeds a narrow framework of Chinese nationalism that has dominated studies on the Qing-Republican transition. Instead of arguing for or against the idea that China was revolutionized or merely reformed (i.e., inherited the characteristics of premodern Chinese society), this dissertation urges consideration of other analytical scales, such as the local, regional, and global. It suggests the need to examine local or regional variations of Chinese identities and nationalism that do not fit comfortably with a state-centered perspective.

Moving along this vein, the dissertation analyzes the interconnected histories and case studies of late Qing Guangdong literati interrogating and navigating their political situation. Ultimately, it proposes that the nation is but one of and not the sole scale of analysis at the turn of the twentieth century in China.

Unlike reformers and revolutionaries, many of whom also originated in Guangdong, some Guangdong literati did not prioritize imagined national obligations over their real provincial identity. Nevertheless, these national and provincial selves did not obliterate each other; through a process of superscription, which allows for interpretive contestations and

accretions of identity without negating any one of its components,<sup>30</sup> literati such as the five described in this dissertation could explain their seemingly conflicted identities as evolving, coexisting, and mutually reinforcing in the political milieu of late Qing China. For them, provincial identity was dynamic and versatile, and they could flexibly justify or uphold it in permutations that could still be considered politically correct amid the “awakening” of China as a nation and the contemporary surge of Chinese nationalism.<sup>31</sup>

On the issue of provincial identity, historical anthropologist Yoshinori Nishizaki offers a useful social-psychological explanation, which is all the more pertinent to this dissertation given its extensive use of biographical sources. In his study of the Thai province Suphan Buri, Nishizaki highlights four components of provincial identity, which I have modified for style and context: 1) history—legacies of state neglect and memories of the backward past; 2) social actions—private donations, state funds, and local-level leadership; 3) institutions—the nature of the state that makes social actions possible; and 4) political entrepreneurs—a clientelist network that advertises social actions in the patron’s name.<sup>32</sup> Although Nishizaki does not define provincial identity and deploys terms that appear anachronistic for the

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<sup>30</sup> For the concept of superscription as first applied in studying Chinese religions, see Prasenjit Duara, “Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (1988): 778–795.

<sup>31</sup> John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Yoshinori Nishizaki, *Political Authority and Provincial Identity in Thailand: The Making of Banharn-buri* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

purposes of this dissertation, he provides a valuable corrective to the overemphasis of nationalism in most general studies on collective identity.

### *The Historical Relevance of Territorial Boundaries*

In the field of Chinese history, G. William Skinner's analysis of physiographic macro-regions has been most influential. While useful in proving the bottom-up integration of regional economies through market forces and downplaying the role of the imperial state, Skinner's model has thrown the baby out with the bathwater by failing to consider how administrative divisions and political structures might continue to shape human identities, the development of ideas and social actions, and long-distance networks beyond the macro-regions.<sup>33</sup> Guangdong fell into Skinner's Lingnan 嶺南 Region, which also included Guangxi Province, Hainan Island, the Pearl River Delta, the Tonkin Gulf, and the West River drainage area. Skinner's model, applicable to continental China, made no provisions for maritime China, to which Guangdong should also belong. Another limitation of the regional research in China area studies is that it has deployed the macroregional concept more as a locational device to discover local history rather than as an analytical tool to understand "human processes and their variation that underlie urbanization and regional formation,

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<sup>33</sup> G. William Skinner, "Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth-Century China," in *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 211–249.



especially social and cultural practices, long-distance trade, and associated economic activities” outside bounded units of analysis.<sup>34</sup>

However, political or territorial divisions remain relevant in China area studies for creating and consolidating local identities over time. As historian R. Kent Guy suggests, regional identities took on the identities of their governors, who were appointed for their skills in resolving issues specific to the provinces for which they were responsible. Endemic issues or problems defined regional identities, which in turn developed from generations of governors possessing a particular set of skills.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, historian John Fitzgerald has written, “once a territorial unit of government has been created at any level, it generates interactions among and between parts of the political system and elements of the social, cultural, and economic environment.”<sup>36</sup> As a form of collective identity, albeit “below” the level of nation and region in scale but not in historical significance, provincialism existed on its own merit. From an institutional perspective, Guy and Fitzgerald have explained the relationship between administrative or territorial boundaries and identity formation. What remains lacking in the extant literature is an elaboration of how provincial identity or pride became

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<sup>34</sup> Carolyn Cartier, “Origins and Evolution of a Geographical Idea: The Macroregion in China,” *Modern China* 28, no. 1 (2002): 81.

<sup>35</sup> Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces*, 289.

<sup>36</sup> John Fitzgerald, “The Province in History,” in *Rethinking China’s Provinces*, ed. John Fitzgerald (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 13.

intertwined with both sub-provincial affiliations and extra-provincial networks that were regional, national, and global in scale.

Moreover, administrative or territorial divides were not the only source of Guangdong people's provincial identity. In urging for greater sensitivity toward the local, regional, and global, this dissertation highlights the economic, political, and social networks of Guangdong literati in their province, Southeast Asia, and further afield in North America. Contrary to the common definition of the "elite" in the imperial Chinese context, the Guangdong literati described in this dissertation were not landowners and did not possess even the mobile wealth of merchants. These literati thus sought financial support from their province's merchants, settlers, and sojourners of Southeast Asia and North America, where the latter groups, either as compradors or laborers, had created an informal commercial empire in Western colonies. They positioned themselves as custodians of provincial culture and established themselves as defenders of provincial identity, standing in sharp contrast to conservative, inefficient, and unfeeling Manchu rulers who had failed to develop Guangdong in all aspects and protect it from foreign imperialism. Through such social actions, they became patrons of their donors and supporters and spearheaded cultural and political developments in the province in their own vision. Focusing on how the Guangdong people's provincial identity was maintained across space and time, this dissertation makes a unique contribution toward embedding

provincialism in cultural production, identity politics, and network formation in specific case studies in Qing-dynasty Guangdong.

### *The Fusion of National and Provincial Loyalties*

What made the fusion of national and provincial loyalties possible was the loosely coordinated yet culturally imaginative Guangdong literati, whose practices were local but whose visions had long been national. The imagination of these literati, manifested in Guangdong politics as well as in cultural and social life, endowed Guangdong identity with a provincial character and provincial identity, an unmistakable “Chineseness.” Like the German bourgeois elite of the late nineteenth century,<sup>37</sup> Guangdong literati were, for all the love they professed for the imagined Chinese nation, local notables. They could make only restricted use of political arguments from precedents or tradition because the only examples available to them came from outside Guangdong. The infusion of a modern grammar of local autonomy as well as the spatial dimensions that such autonomy could assume broke the intellectual dependence of Guangdong on the Qing state and created an independent scholarly elite and a specifically Guangdong academic culture. This new state of affairs enabled the Guangdong literati, bereft of longstanding national traditions or truly national experience enjoyed by their

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<sup>37</sup> Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials*.

counterparts in, for example, Hunan or the northwestern Guanzhong region, to articulate a localist worldview.<sup>38</sup>

An obvious example was Ou Jujia, who invoked the concept of natural rights to argue that the Guangdong people, or the Han race in general, were not inferior to the Manchus, who had denied them their fundamental rights as human beings and, without permission, compromised their interests by ceding their property and territory to foreign powers. For violating the rights of the Guangdong people, Ou Jujia suggested, the Manchus must be overthrown. For Ou Jujia, Qiu Fengjia, and Liang Jushi, the Manchus were foreign in the sense that they possessed none of the love that the Guangdong people had for their own home and province.

Though not revolutionaries, these Guangdong literati emphatically rejected the Manchus' claim of a mandate to replace the Ming in ruling China. They separated the state from the nation and sought control of their own affairs and political authority in the province that they had begun to regard as part of the Chinese nation but did not necessarily belong to either the Manchu state or the Qing dynasty. For them, the general principle that all people should be ruled by members of their own culture or race became an inalienable political right. Taking account of and explaining away cultural and linguistic differences, they claimed a set

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<sup>38</sup> Platt, *Provincial Patriots*; Chang Woei Ong, *Men of Letters within the Passes: Guanzhong Literati in Chinese History, 907–1911* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008).

of natural rights supposedly shared by all people everywhere. The nation, composed of its counties, prefectures, and provinces, became a “naturalized” political community.

At the very least, then, what the Guangdong literati offered was a common experience of China’s provincial and sub-provincial diversities. The political power of the Guangdong literati, basically provincial, developed from local wealth and local bureaucratic office. As local elites, they reproduced themselves through kinship, friendship, mentorship, and association among the locally prominent. Provincial identity thus appeared as a set of perceived affiliations and obligations intertwined with feelings of exceptionalism and pride, finite in space but unbounded in time and imagination. It was more a sensibility than a fixed idea, a product of empirical rather than theoretical engagement.

### *A Priori Attributes of Provincialism*

No culture, nation, or society has ever possessed a single and comprehensive identity. And no one group, however eloquent, could claim to speak for an entire community and impose on their people an identity or political culture that most of them did not share. But provincial identity, at least for now, had three attributes. First, it evoked local solutions to national problems. Provincial literati were convinced that they could exercise local autonomy in ways that benefited the state. Second, it was a synecdoche for nationalism—or less anachronistically, proto-nationalism. For provincial literati, local control of fiscal and military matters, as well as their own social actions, contributed to the project of nation-building.

Finally, provincial literati emphasized the role of local academies, government, and industries in setting the rules for central-local engagement. In subtler yet more concrete ways, they had aided the conceptual transition of China from empire to nation.<sup>39</sup>

### **Identity Formation in Imperial Guangdong**

According to historical anthropologist David Faure, what we now call Guangdong became “Cantonese” during the Ming dynasty. I have declined to call the Guangdong people Cantonese because, strictly speaking (and as Faure would attest), Cantonese denotes speakers of the Cantonese dialect or *Yueyu* 粵語 (the language of the Yue people) concentrated in Guangzhou, where the local variant of the language was widely regarded as its purest form. While Guangzhou dominated the economy and politics of Guangdong, it could hardly represent the province culturally and linguistically. Calling the Guangdong people Cantonese is akin to calling the Dutch “Hollanders,” the Indonesians “Javanese,” and the Japanese, “Honshu” or “Kansai” people. To assume that language carries identity is also retroactive. Learners of classical Chinese and speakers of Mandarin might also identify themselves as natives of Guangdong, whose dominant language might not be Cantonese.

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<sup>39</sup> Historian Justin M. Jacobs, in his *Xinjiang and the Modern Chinese State* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), has reconceptualized the modern Chinese state as a “national empire,” highlighting how ethnic differences, be they real or imagined, have created an empire of nations ruled by a state that alternates between accommodating and suppressing local claims to ethnic identity.

In addition, this dissertation does not discuss the thoughts of Guangdong's most prominent literati and political thinkers such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Sun Yat-sen, whose political and social lives revolved, at least for a time, around Guangzhou and the Pearl River Delta. Its five protagonists lived and operated mainly at the eastern end of the Pearl River Delta and the eastern coasts of Guangdong, which were economically less developed and politically less important than Guangzhou. The following chapters will devote some attention to explaining the role of geography in biography and politics as well as how ecology and environment shaped the outlooks of Guangdong literati. As an administrative and territorial unit, Guangdong contained cultural, economic, and ideological diversities. This dissertation will thus trace the divergences between its five protagonists and mainstream Guangdong literati, the dominant political cultures to which the five writers responded, and highlight the commonalities and tensions among them. These literati will remain in conversation, but a single literatus will take center stage in each chapter.

But because Guangzhou was the economic and political center of Guangdong, its cultural shifts and historical development signaled general patterns of change in the province. First known for its commerce in exotics,<sup>40</sup> Guangzhou had been culturally divorced from its hinterland until the Ming dynasty. The region surrounding Guangzhou was the site of ancient

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<sup>40</sup> Wang Gungwu, *The Nanhai Trade: The Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998).

kingdoms such as Nanyue 南越 (204–112 BCE) and Southern Han 南漢 (917–971), which have remained sources of historical pride for the Guangdong people.<sup>41</sup>

Although pre-Ming accounts depict sinicized chieftains ruling over barbaric tribes in the area, affiliation with the imperial state came early. The Nanyue Kingdom, for instance, developed from the three commanderies established by the Qin state (221–202 BCE) in southern China. But neither a truly local upper class nor families that remained in Guangzhou for generations emerged until sometime after the end of the Tang dynasty (618–907), as suggested by the native origins of Southern Han kings and their courtiers. In subsequent centuries, as Guangzhou expanded both demographically and economically, corporate lineages emerged to build dykes, reclaim land, and populate the hinterland.<sup>42</sup>

By the Ming period, Guangdong was no longer exotic. Literati of note emerged from the province, and they began to research or document its history. They compiled geographical books (*dili shu* 地理書) and local gazetteers (*difang zhi* 地方志)—a trend developed in culturally advanced provinces since the Song dynasty (960–1279)—to display an intellectual culture that had achieved national standards.<sup>43</sup> Such writings resulted from collaborative projects and were thus a collective symbol of solidarity. For historian Peter Bol, the

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<sup>41</sup> Diana Lary, “The Tomb of the King of Nanyue—The Contemporary Agenda of History: Scholarship and Identity,” *Modern China* 22, no. 1 (1996): 3–27.

<sup>42</sup> David Faure, “Becoming Cantonese: The Ming Transition,” in *Unity and Diversity: Local Cultures and Identities in China*, eds. Tao Tao Liu and David Faure (Hong Kong: HKU Press, 1996), 37–39.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph R. Dennis, *Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Gazetteers in Imperial China, 1100–1700* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015).



emergence of local histories suggests that literati came to see the nation as a collection of localities—the local was no longer subordinate to the national.

In effect, literati began to reconceptualize the nation as less centralized, less imperial and less derivative of court culture, even though they desired to join the national elite as defined by the civil service examinations and literary achievements.<sup>44</sup> The literati of Guangdong portrayed the province as civilized while remaining Guangzhou-centric in defining Cantonese as the standard tone, disparaging the dialects of Chaozhou as crude, and ignoring the presence of the Hakka language.<sup>45</sup> With their economic resources, Guangdong's corporate lineages groomed an increasing number of literati for success at the examinations even though most of the national elite belatedly acknowledged the province's flourishing literati culture only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>46</sup>

### **Joining the National Elite While Maintaining Provincial Identity**

The desire of Guangdong literati to take the examinations suggests that they were willing to perform political duties at the national level and hence integrate into the imperial state. For them, passing the examinations and serving the state as an official was the primary if not the only route to personal and professional success. Sitting or merely preparing for the

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<sup>44</sup> Peter K. Bol, "The Rise of Local History: History, Geography, and Culture in Southern Song and Yuan Wuzhou," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61, no. 1 (2001): 37–76.

<sup>45</sup> Faure, "Becoming Cantonese," 40.

<sup>46</sup> Miles, *The Sea of Learning*.

examinations could socialize them into modes of thought prescribed by the state.<sup>47</sup> However, for most of the Guangdong people, including members of corporate lineages who supported kin and friends to obtain a degree or office but did not attempt the examinations, forming national networks was less important than possessing land and/or wealth in attaining their desired social status. On their part, lineages, religious practitioners, and village leaders integrated the state into their communities. The *lijia* 里甲 system of tax collection, commonly regarded as imposed by the state, corresponded with the communal boundaries that preexisted based on the worship of local deities.<sup>48</sup> To secure the cooperation of local elites for governance, the state endorsed the local deities and mandated the local temples; local elites created orthodox cults for images that the state had endorsed and sought further state recognition.<sup>49</sup> Through these arrangements, local and state interests were closely intertwined by the end of the Ming, and identification with the local could easily be confused with identification with the state.

Genealogies (*zupu* 族譜) tied a person to the place with which he identified in the way gazetteers tied a place to the state. The ideology that upheld genealogies as historical and politically useful records of lineages was the teachings of Song-dynasty philosopher Zhu Xi

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<sup>47</sup> Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> Faure, "Becoming Cantonese," 40.

<sup>49</sup> Vincent Goossaert, "The Shifting Balance of Power in the City God Temples, Late Qing to 1937," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 43, no. 1 (2015): 6–9.

朱熹 (1130–1200), which provided standardized rituals that could be used in ancestral worship, funerals, and marriages. By performing the rituals, adherents of Zhu Xi’s philosophy expressed filial piety to their ancestors while demonstrating their deference to imperial authority. The genealogies on which the lineage system rested integrated local communities into the Ming and Qing empires and justified their inclusion in the civilized realm.<sup>50</sup> An increasing number of literati who received a classical education at clan and community schools became professional compilers of genealogies for lineages and wealthy families and through their writing helped erase any trace of supposedly barbaric descent from the so-called Yue peoples. Genealogies compiled for families rather than lineages usually contained a chapter called “family advice” (*jiaxun* 家訓), which, like the “ancestral advice” (*zuxun* 祖訓) in lineage genealogies, offered traces of unique familial identities that formed under native-place and national identities. Like gazetteers, genealogies, regardless of the family, lineage, county, or prefecture for which they were written, contained references to the province where they were commissioned. They thus implied the identification of their compilers and patrons with the administrative or territorial boundaries and names or terms set by the imperial state.

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<sup>50</sup> Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Thomas A. Wilson, *Genealogy of the Way: The Construction and Uses of the Confucian Tradition in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

In due course, ancestral halls, or family temples, replaced temples dedicated to deities as the locus of territorial organization. Only families related to bureaucrats could build ancestral halls, which thus symbolized affiliation with officialdom and scholarship. As Faure has summarized, although genealogies and ancestral halls did not create lineages, they located lineages in specific geographical territories and endowed them with a place within the imperial order. Guangdong was thus no longer inhabited by barbarians, but by “proper subjects of his imperial majesty, that is, people of the Han race.”<sup>51</sup>

Guangzhou remains the focus in historian Steven B. Miles’s study of identity in nineteenth-century Guangdong. Like Faure, Miles describes how the proliferation of localist texts, such as gazetteers, anthologies of local literature, histories of Nanyue and Southern Han, collected biographies of local notables, and local epigraphical writings, suggests the existence of local identities in Guangdong. Unlike Faure, however, Miles emphasizes the role of itinerant literati in disseminating and cohering ideas as well as in engendering and fostering a variety of identities among the Guangdong people. For Miles, academies rather than lineages instituted the creation of identity by allowing literati to coherently reflect on the history of their own province as well as on broad issues of morality, style, taste, and evidential research. The identities highlighted include cultural identity, elite identity, native-place identity, and scholarly identity. How these identities coalesced into or could be related

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<sup>51</sup> Faure, “Becoming Cantonese,” 44.

to an overarching provincial identity remains unclear, given the limited geographical scope within which they are framed in Miles's analysis.<sup>52</sup>

Zooming in on the cultural and textual production of Guangdong during the late Qing and early Republican periods, historian Cheng Meibao 程美寶 examines how, on the eve of dynastic collapse and in the wake of political renewal, the literati of Guangdong aligned themselves culturally with the Chinese nation. Following the administrative or territorial parameters of the state that defined Guangdong as a province, Guangdong literati selected and debated over elements of culture, folklore, and ethnography in southern China for inclusion in their province's geo-body. Although Cheng has persuasively argued that Guangdong literati trod a fine line between asserting their own individuality vis-à-vis other provinces and averring their membership in the new republic, the basic question of why such a dilemma or tension had arisen remains inadequately explored.<sup>53</sup>

This dissertation complements Cheng's book by zeroing in on the construction of identity and reality in—rather than by—individual literati, who might have shared the tension but resolved it through non-cultural means. By the nineteenth century, Guangdong had developed local industries catering to domestic markets and overseas ones in Southeast Asia. Consequently, through import substitution, it reduced dependence on goods imported from

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<sup>52</sup> Miles, *The Sea of Learning*.

<sup>53</sup> Cheng, *Diyu wenhua yu guojia rentong*. See also Virgil K. Y. Ho, *Understanding Canton: Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

other Qing provinces,<sup>54</sup> allowing its literati to imagine a future without the Qing state or political interference from the imperial center. This dissertation asks why Guangdong, a wealthy province geographically isolated from the imperial metropolis in northern China, did not generate an intense realization of separateness on the part of its literati.

### **Excluding Provincialism**

Despite the close connection between provincial identities and Chinese nationalism, the former has been excluded from the historical record. Consider federalism, which might have been the fullest exposition of provincialism in Republican China. Tracing the development and eventual disavowal of federalist ideas by twentieth-century Chinese literati, Prasenjit Duara suggests that “in the end, the interplay of power politics and authoritative language enabled the hegemonic, centralizing nationalist narrative to destroy and ideologically bury the federalist alternative early in the history of modern China.”<sup>55</sup> For Duara, federalism was a vehicle for nationalism and self-destructed when the concept of a Chinese nation sank into the psyche of the people. Political scientist Steven Phillips elaborates on Duara’s argument by stating that federalism did not succeed because nationalist

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<sup>54</sup> Seung-Joon Lee, *Gourmets in the Land of Famine: The Culture and Politics of Rice in Modern Canton* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 177–178.

elites demonized it and led the people to think that federalism indicated a return to a premodern, oppressive past.<sup>56</sup>

Despite their incisive analyses, both Duara and Phillips appear to have overstated the success of nationalism in subsuming all forms of localism (*difang zhuyi* 地方主義) or regionalism (*diqu zhuyi* 地區主義), of which provincialism was a part. For mere comparison, had they extended their inquiry to include the post-1949 period, when Nationalist rule in mainland China ended, they might realize that localism in twentieth-century China had the capacity to evolve from federalism into a politically less-expressive form of provincialism when a strong centralized state was present. Provincialism does not disappear because it has changed into forms that accommodate state interests and allay state fears of separatist movements.

As soon as provincialism assumed a shape and some influence at the turn of the twentieth century, it was viewed with suspicion and skepticism by the nationalist leaders who eventually gained control of Chinese politics and intellectual culture after the fall of the Qing. In the 1890s, Sun Yat-sen, widely regarded as the father of the Chinese nation, proposed that a local self-government be established in every province with administrative, executive, and judicial powers beyond the control of the central government. In many ways, he was merely

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<sup>56</sup> Steven Phillips, "The Demonization of Federalism in Republican China," in *Defunct Federalisms: Critical Perspectives on Federal Failure*, eds. Emilian Kavalski and Magdalena Zolkos (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 88.

endorsing the preexisting political arrangements between the state and the local gentry in the southern provinces, which enjoyed great autonomy under their semi-independent governors.

Sun Yat-sen expressed this view amid political tensions intensified by the Qing Empire's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the failure of the 1898 Hundred Days' Reform inspired by Kang Youwei and led by Han ministers.<sup>57</sup>

Not yet a revolutionary, Sun Yat-sen viewed democracy and local self-government not as independent values, but as preconditions for his aim of national integration.<sup>58</sup> After turning decisively anti-Manchu and anti-Qing, he urged the independence of all provinces in order to overthrow the imperial state. More so than counties and prefectures, provinces could attain self-sufficiency in agriculture and commerce and serve as a cornerstone of political reunification. Provinces, as self-governing political units, could muster the resources of local elites and strengthen, not weaken, central leadership against foreign imperialism.<sup>59</sup>

Positions of power affected perceptions of provincialism. In 1900, the Boxer Rebellion broke out and saw the Qing court capitalize on anti-foreign millenarian movements to declare war on foreign imperialism. The outcome was the occupation of Beijing by foreign troops and a pledge to foreign powers by southern governors that they would not participate

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<sup>57</sup> Luke S. K. Kwong, *A Mosaic of a Hundred Days: Personalities, Politics, and Ideas of 1898* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984).

<sup>58</sup> Philip A. Kuhn, "Local Self-Government under the Republic," in *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, eds. Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Carolyn Grant (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 283.

<sup>59</sup> Ding Xuguang 丁旭光, *Jindai Zhongguo difang zizhi yanjiu* 近代中國地方自治研究 (A study of local self-government in modern China) (Guangzhou: Guangzhou chubanshe, 1993), 28–33.



in the war or reinforce the Qing forces. In what is now known as the “Mutual Defense Pact of the Southeastern Provinces” (*dongnan hubao* 東南互保), the southern provinces verged on seceding from the rest of Qing China; Guangdong was one of them.<sup>60</sup> Sun Yat-sen welcomed this development, but it ended when the Qing court reconciled with the invaders, returned to Beijing, and restored order in the empire. In the 1910s, founding the republic, Sun Yat-sen became wary of the uses of provincialism by military leaders, who might secede from any centralized authority and justify secession with federalist pretensions.

In a similar vein, Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976), who would lead the Chinese communists in unseating the Nationalists from power, had supported the idea of his native Hunan Province becoming a federal state before he joined the communists. After assuming leadership, however, he argued against provincialism for fear that it would threaten national unity.<sup>61</sup> Despite their ideological differences, Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong, once in power, came to reject provincialism in favor of centralist nationalism, or nationalism as defined and developed by only the state. Such nationalism conjoined the state with the lower class, to which most people belonged and hence in which much political support originated, against not only foreign influence but also the intervention of hypocritical, opportunist, and predatory

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<sup>60</sup> Lin Shiming 林世明, *Yihetuan shibian qijian dongnan hubao zhi yanjiu* 義和團事變期間東南互保之研究 (A study of the Mutual Defense Pact of the Southeastern Provinces during the Boxer Rebellion) (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1980).

<sup>61</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 177–204.

literati and bourgeois elite, who, as leftwing historiography has claimed, advanced their own interests at the expense of others.

The legacy of centralist nationalism was broad. Both the Nationalist and Communist regimes of China deprived Han provinces and non-Han “autonomous” regions of actual powers and resources for self-rule within their state. Their gestural politics of granting autonomy that operated in name rather than in practice, manifested in considerable control over local government and supervision of local affairs by state administrators from the capital, demonstrated how much of their political legitimacy lay in fastening all provinces and regions of the former Qing Empire to the political center.<sup>62</sup>

The views of national founders also filtered into Chinese and American historical scholarship and social sciences, conflating provincialism with elitism and separatism. To project an image of national unity, the political impulse of the Nationalist and Communist regimes has been to purge the historical narrative of its separatist elements, including the provincial identities that collectively formed the modern Chinese nation.

The history of Guangdong provincialism and the literati associated with it has thus become obscure. In the eyes of national leaders and patriotic historians, provincially minded literati were not nationalist enough and, by default, were elitist as well as ideologically

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<sup>62</sup> James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and Its Indigenes Became Chinese* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Hsiao-ting Lin, *Modern China's Ethnic Frontiers: A Journey to the West* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

subversive. Such “problematic” literati veiled the nation’s true essence through the sophistry of pro-foreign internationalism.

Provincialism became an idea of dubious if not Western origins that, if not for the intervention of the nation’s founders and patriotic sacrifices of the people, could have torn apart the nation. Post-1949 nationalist historiography has paid sympathetic attention to fallen heroes, martyrs, and revolutionaries of even the Nationalist camp rather than to provincial literati within the mainland.

The burial of provincialism in Chinese and even American historical scholarship thus stems from an elite-versus-the-rest demonology that grossly simplifies the composition and interests of two poorly defined groups. As this dissertation will suggest, the so-called elites were ideologically divided at the turn of the twentieth century and had remained so for decades. Their political effectiveness depended on their ability to forge coalitions or a sense of solidarity with other classes, which was the case for Guangdong literati and their merchant sponsors and commoner supporters. In light of the historiographical aporia concerning Chinese provincialism or provincial identities, this dissertation aims to “rescue” the province from the nation and assess the attributes of provincialism on its own terms.

### **Summary of Contents**

This dissertation comprises two parts. Part 1, “National Identity: Parting with the Tributaries,” consists of two chapters on Guangdong literati-officials who, for professional

success, assumed a primarily national identity and hence national responsibilities when serving the Qing state. It highlights their surprisingly deep involvement in dealing with the separation of Ryukyu and Vietnam from the Qing tributary system. Although the two literati, He Ruzhang and Deng Chengxiu, did not specifically address Guangdong issues, they lived through the cession of Hong Kong Island to the British after the Opium War, the Anglo-French occupation of Guangzhou during the Boxer Rebellion, and sporadic border skirmishes between British or French forces and Chinese garrisons or militias. Their memories translated into experience when they were tasked to negotiate with foreign diplomats over the “disposition” or annexation of China’s tributary polities.

Part 2, “Provincial Identity: New Guangdong in Old China,” analyzes the efforts of three Guangdong literati in creating the figurative category of the “province” as a site of positive change and discouraging the rising skepticism that provincialism would be detrimental to nation building. Historian Joseph R. Levenson has suggested that the Qing period was one of transition from *tianxia* 天下 to *guojia* 國家, empire and world to nation. For Levenson, Chinese nationalism “involved a scaling up from a collection of provinces, a scaling down from a world.”<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, by dividing the Chinese people into provincials (province), nationalists (nation), and cosmopolitans (world), Levenson has drawn too sharp a

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<sup>63</sup> Joseph R. Levenson, “The Province, the Nation, and the World: The Problem of Chinese Identity,” in *Approaches to Modern Chinese History*, eds. Albert Feuerwerker, Rhoads Murphy, and Mary Clabaugh Wright (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 287.

distinction between these groups. Part 2 suggests that we have to be attentive to the often subtle ways that provincially oriented literati—save perhaps for Ou Jujia—talked back to the nationalists and reconceptualized their identity vis-à-vis China and the world. Taking Parts 1 and 2 together, this dissertation shows how the Guangdong literati, who could have focused on national developments, came to tend to affairs in their province by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chapter one draws on recent scholarly writings, especially those from contemporary China, to examine the life and activities of He Ruzhang 何如璋 (1838–1891), who was crucial in stimulating the Qing state’s responses to Japan’s annexation of Ryukyu during his term as China’s first minister to Japan. In 1879, Ryukyu was annexed by Meiji Japan. Past scholarly works have focused on prominent statesman Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901) and the Zongli Yamen, the stewards of affairs relating to foreigners, in examining the Qing court’s responses to Japan’s annexation of Ryukyu. By incorporating the latest arguments of Western and especially Chinese scholarship, this chapter investigates the attempts by He Ruzhang to reestablish Ryukyu’s tributary relationship with China and maintain Ryukyu’s independence. The Ryukyu issue or “disposition” is reassessed by contextualizing it in late Qing bureaucratic culture and institutional innovations. While the Qing system of appointments enabled He Ruzhang, who was unconnected to any powerful political clique in Beijing, to serve as minister to Japan, political rivalry and a lack of coordination among

political institutions and personnel responsible for managing foreign affairs frustrated his efforts as a scholar-official to uphold the Chinese tributary system.

Chapter two examines the career and experiences of Deng Chengxiu 鄧承修 (1841–1892), the only “Qingliu” 清流 (Pure Stream) member from Guangdong. The Qingliu was an extremely loose, Beijing-based coalition of Hanlin academicians and concerned scholar-officials professing to serve as the moral conscience and custodian of traditional ideas and practices. The chapter offers a different interpretation of Qingliu and its supposed antithesis, the “Yangwu” 洋務 clique of self-strengtheners, who deployed Western ways to reconstruct the imperial structure, by treating them as two divergent paths to higher office for aspirants who found themselves outside the geographies of influence.

After the Sino-French War (1884–1885), Deng supervised the survey of Guangdong’s border with Vietnam. Frustrated in his futile attempts to defend Qing China’s interests in the Sino-French negotiations, he quit office and returned to Guangdong, where he helped found a school offering both Confucian curriculum and foreign languages and subjects. Instead of regarding Deng’s odyssey in political circles as an isolated case of career progress and failure, the chapter situates his encounters in the late Qing political culture of factionalism. Because he was unconnected to dominant political networks, the chapter suggests, Deng became a fearlessly frank censor, circumventing the limitations that geography and imperial politics set upon his career advancement.

Chapter three discusses the impact of Japan's annexation of Taiwan Province after the First Sino-Japanese War on the growth of a provincial identity in Guangdong. The Fujian and Guangdong settlers of Taiwan established the Taiwan Republic to resist the Japanese takeover, but they were quickly defeated and evacuated to the mainland where they had to reconstruct their lives and redefine their role in history. This chapter revisits the deeds and thought of Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912), one of the “exiles” from Taiwan. Though a leader of the Taiwan Republic who had sworn to perish with it if he must, Qiu escaped to Guangdong, his ancestral province, where he had to rehabilitate his reputation. This chapter explores how he redeemed himself through poetry and contributions to education in the Chaoshan 潮汕 area, his adopted home in Guangdong.

By invoking the common bonds of culture, geography, and language to explain why natives of Guangdong should have greater sympathy for the Taiwan Republic and why the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia should care about conditions in their home province, Qiu Fengjia imagined a Chinese proto-nation that could resist foreign imperialism through philanthropy and educational reforms. Interestingly, despite his resistance to Japan, Qiu came to endorse Japanese-inspired Asianism. The chapter thus highlights how his views comprised an unlikely mixture of anti-imperialism, Asianism, and provincialism.

Chapter four focuses on perhaps the most radical of the five literati—Ou Jujia. Under the revolution paradigm of existing Chinese historiography, Chinese literati of the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are interpreted as either supporting or resisting monarchical rule in late Qing China. Ou was famous—or notorious—for his attempts to initiate an independence movement that remained peripheral to the mainstream revolutionary and reformist efforts to end or alter Qing rule. Ou’s political treatise *New Guangdong* thus also remains relatively unappreciated in contemporary Western narratives of China’s modern past. The chapter examines the implications of *New Guangdong* for late Qing politics. The themes of provincial consciousness and global awareness of Chinese literati have been explored at some length, but very few historians have embedded them in the context of federalism. *New Guangdong* called for Guangdong’s independence from the Qing so that it could later reunite with other “free” provinces as a federated China. Federalist ideas percolated into Guangdong and merged with a provincial impulse toward an identity that was simultaneously local, regional, and global.

Ou Jujia represented a generation of Guangdong literati who were comfortable with foreign political structures not because they endorsed imperialism—quite the contrary—but because they identified within them the potentialities of a constructive provincialism that would benefit the Chinese state. By suggesting that Guangdong could become a model province of a reformed China, Ou defined the “province” as the basic unit of Chinese federalism and made it central to discussions of China’s future in the 1900s.



Chapter five turns to Liang Jushi 梁居實 (1843–1911), whose views on China and its economy and society stemmed from his fear that Guangdong might be colonized or partitioned by foreign powers. Liang Jushi partly derived his ideas from the West, Japan, and vanquished nations such as Poland, but the greater influence came from the Western colonies in Southeast Asia, where his friends became successful entrepreneurs. By regarding these predominantly Chinese-populated colonies more as a source of inspiration than a symbol of subjugation, Liang Jushi formulated a broader Chinese worldview of anti-imperialism. From Liang’s perspective, the colonial experience in Southeast Asia could be transplanted to Guangdong, which might then serve as a model province for an industrializing China. At stake was not just the building of an industrial economy but also a redefinition of mental and provincial boundaries as well as central-local relations. The entanglement of provincial interests with national fate reveals why, despite his downplaying of state control of the local economy and resources, Liang still took for granted that Guangdong constituted part of the Chinese nation.

Almost without exception, the five literati described in this dissertation have largely been forgotten in historical scholarship and contemporary politics. Reforms instituted in the late 1970s by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904–1997) have allowed Guangdong to move one step ahead of the rest of China in testing and putting into practice new economic and political policies. For China’s central government, Guangdong has the “peripheral

advantage” of being the province to experiment with radical new ideas and contain the possible excesses of implementation—the impact of economic and political disruptions would not threaten the core areas surrounding the capital or metropolitan centers.<sup>64</sup> Central-local relations remain a work in progress in Guangdong, where economic and (if we were to consider Hong Kong too) political decentralization since the 1980s has led to de-facto federalism in the province. One crucial point to which the dissertation will continually return is that such decentralization had begun earlier, during the late Qing, without the post-factum endorsement of trends and practices by the contemporary Chinese state.<sup>65</sup> It is the task of this dissertation to historicize the process, illuminate its significance, and unearth its potentialities for the future.

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<sup>64</sup> Zheng, *De Facto Federalism in China*, 238.

<sup>65</sup> Ezra F. Vogel, *One Step Ahead in China: Guangdong Under Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

## Chapter One: He Ruzhang and Japan's Annexation of the Ryukyu Kingdom

### Introduction

It is now understood that the Qing state (1644 to 1912), demonstrated a great deal of institutional flexibility in ruling China. Its bureaucratic institutions, mostly inherited from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), allowed the Qing ruler to delegate his administrative powers through regular government offices. It developed the extra-bureaucratic Grand Council (*junjichu* 軍機處), comprised of Manchu princes and Han Chinese ministers, and the secret palace memorial system through which the emperor could exert direct control by putting both provincial and sub-provincial officials under military surveillance. The Qing state was thus capable of introspection and innovation before the outbreak of the First Opium War (1839–1842) and the arrival of Western advisers in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Qing ruling strategies and political innovations continued to evolve in the late nineteenth century, which historians have mistakenly identified as a period of stagnation and imperial decline for China. To cope with frequent rebellions and increasing unrest, the Qing state “retreated” from local government and left governors, prefects, and magistrates to use

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<sup>1</sup> For the bureaucratic and extra-bureaucratic workings of the Qing government, see Silas H.L. Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China: Evolution of the Palace Memorial System, 1693–1735* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Beatrice Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644–1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010); and Wensheng Wang, *White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates: Crisis and Reform in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). For the Western advisers, see Jonathan D. Spence, *To Change China: Western Advisers in China, 1620–1960* (Boston: Little Brown, 1969).

their discretion in resolving crises, which often required the cooperation of the local gentry. The reconfiguration of the state's relationship with the people and local authorities enabled the rapid mobilization of urban and rural communities against the Taiping rebels (1850–1864), particularly in the southern provinces of China where imperial control was weaker than in the north. Although Qing institutional flexibility was adequate in quelling the Taiping Rebellion, it failed to contain Western mercantile activities through the Canton system of limited trade and engagement and to accommodate the wish for Westphalian-style diplomatic relations with China by foreign representatives. The Qing state was thus on the cusp of further innovations in the late nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

### *Key Arguments*

This chapter draws on recent scholarly writings, especially those from contemporary China, to examine the life and activities of He Ruzhang 何如璋 (1838–1891) against the backdrop of such innovations. A Hanlin academician, He Ruzhang served as China's first minister to Japan from 1877 to 1880. Although his hand-picked attaché, Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905), would prove over the long run to be more important and influential as a

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<sup>2</sup> For the reconfiguration of power relations in the Qing state, see William T. Rowe, "The Significance of the Qianlong-Jiaqing Transition in Qing History," *Late Imperial China* 32, no. 2 (2011): 74–88; Daniel McMahon, *Rethinking the Decline of China's Qing Dynasty: Imperial Activism and Borderland Management at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2015); and Seunghyun Han, *After the Prosperous Age: State and Elites in Early Nineteenth-Century Suzhou* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016). For the Canton system, see Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005).

diplomat to Japan, He Ruzhang's role was crucial in stimulating the Qing state's responses to Japan's annexation of Ryukyu during his term.<sup>3</sup> The fledgling institutional innovations developed by the Qing state included 1) the Zongli Yamen 總理衙門, a specialized office to manage foreigners inside China; and 2) legations representing Chinese interests abroad to manage foreign relations outside China. But these had yet to result in a concerted, uniform policy toward Japan's actions in Ryukyu. He Ruzhang's interactions with Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), the “one-man foreign office” competing with the Zongli Yamen for the prerogative to handle foreign affairs,<sup>4</sup> showed differing approaches and tactics on the Ryukyu issue.

The differences arose from He Ruzhang's background as a traditional Confucian scholar-official. This involves another institutional trend—the deployment of “regular path” (*zhengtu* 正途) bureaucrats for ad hoc, temporary positions and of “irregular path” (*yitu* 異

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<sup>3</sup> Examples of Chinese works on Ryukyu include Xie Bizhen 謝必震, *Ming Qing Zhong Liu hanghai maoyi yanjiu* 明清中琉航海貿易研究 (A study of Sino-Ryukyuan maritime trade in the Ming-Qing era) (Beijing: Haiyang chubanshe, 2004); Lai Zhengwei 賴正維, *Qingdai Zhong Liu guanxi yanjiu* 清代中琉關係研究 (A study of Sino-Ryukyuan relations during the Qing dynasty) (Beijing: Haiyang chubanshe, 2011); and Dai Dongyang 戴東陽, *Wan Qing zhu Ri shituan yu Jiawu zhan qian de Zhong Ri guanxi (1876–1894)* 晚清駐日使團與甲午戰前的中日關係 (1876–1894) (Chinese diplomatic missions in Japan and Sino-Japanese relations before the First Sino-Japanese War, 1876–1894) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012). Several Japanese scholars have also called the annexation of Ryukyu an “incident” (*Ryukyu jiken* 琉球事件), but most scholars used the term *Ryukyu shobun* 琉球処分 (Ryukyu disposition). For instance, see Kinjo Seitoku 金城正篤, *Ryukyu shobun ron* 琉球処分論 (A discussion of the Ryukyu disposition) (Naha: Okinawa Taimususha, 1978); Arakawa Akira 新川明, *Ryukyu shobun igo* 琉球処分以後 (After the Ryukyu disposition) (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1981); Akamine Mamoru 赤嶺守, *Ryukyu okoku: higashi Ajia no kona suton* 琉球王国: 東アジアのコーナーストーン (The Ryukyu Kingdom: cornerstone of East Asia) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Edwin Pak-wah Leung, “Li Hung-chang and the Liu-ch’iu (Ryukyu) Controversy, 1871–1881,” in Samuel C. Chu and Kwang-Ching Liu, eds., *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 170. Leung's article, otherwise an excellent account of Japan's annexation of Ryukyu, considers the issue largely from the perspectives of Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen and pays scant attention to He Ruzhang.

途) officials who purchased office and assumed official duties by recommendation. He

Ruzhang was a “regular path” bureaucrat who passed the metropolitan examinations, became a Hanlin academician, and served as minister to Japan by Li Hongzhang’s recommendation (*baojū* 保舉). In Japan, a “cultural cousin” of China, He Ruzhang’s erudition and cultural attainments were celebrated. He gained the goodwill of most Japanese.<sup>5</sup> His worldview held China at the center of a moral universe and obliged him to arbitrate disputes and assist tributary polities in their times of need. This placed him at odds with the diplomatic and geopolitical considerations of Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen, who had few qualms about dismantling China’s tributary order.

### *Chapter Outline*

This chapter comprises three main sections. The first section describes how He Ruzhang became China’s first minister to Japan and contextualizes it in the recruitment of *zhengtu* and *yitu* bureaucrats in late Qing China. The next section investigates He Ruzhang’s role and responsibilities as the minister to Japan with respect to Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen. It also suggests the disadvantages of having such an arrangement between He Ruzhang and his superiors back in China. The third section examines He Ruzhang’s

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<sup>5</sup> He Ruzhang was the major exception—most of the *zhengtu* bureaucrats who accepted postings abroad as ministers realized that their classical Chinese learning was ignored and irrelevant to their assignment. See Douglas R. Reynolds, *East Meets East: Chinese Discover the Modern World in Japan, 1854–1898* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2014), 418.

proposals for aiding Ryukyu against the Japanese and the responses of Li Hongzhang and the Qing court.

## He Ruzhang, China's First Minister to Japan

### *Humble Beginnings*

Born in 1838 in Dapu 大埔 County in Guangdong Province, He Ruzhang quickly showed promise in his studies as a diligent and precocious child. His father, a poor farmer, had removed him from community school so that he could raise cattle and support the family. His uncle, a tribute student (*gongsheng* 貢生) who passed the licensing examinations and received the *shengyuan* 生員 degree, noticed his potential and enabled him to take the examinations and earn the *shengyuan* title. At the age of 24 years, He Ruzhang passed the provincial examinations and became a provincial graduate (*juren* 舉人).<sup>6</sup>

However, these were challenging times. The Taiping Rebellion had devastated the southern half of China, and He Ruzhang received his first appointment as an aide-de-camp or regular staff member (*muliao* 幕僚) in Tingzhou 汀州 Prefecture, Fujian Province, only after 1865, when the Taiping rebels were defeated. To serve on the regular staff, a degree was not required, but there was little that He Ruzhang could do as a *shengyuan* holder. In his

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<sup>6</sup> Yu Zheng 俞政, *He Ruzhang zhuan* 何如璋傳 (A biography of He Ruzhang) (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1991), 3–4. Tribute students enjoyed legal and tax benefits and, at the recommendation of the magistrates, could study at the Hanlin Academy or receive appointments to minor offices. See Benjamin A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4.

generation alone, tens of thousands of young men like him held the *gongsheng* or *shengyuan* title that qualified them for minor official appointments. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the sale and purchase of offices (*juanna* 捐納) became a growing problem for seekers of office on the regular path of the civil service examinations. From the beginning of the Taiping Rebellion in 1850 until 1911, the proportion of officials who received their posts without following the regular route grew from 50 percent to some two-thirds.

He Ruzhang's problem was aggravated by the fact that after suppressing the Taiping Rebellion, the Qing court compensated the gentry for their wartime contribution by raising the quotas of students who could pass the licensing examinations and receive *shengyuan* status, which resulted in an increase of *shengyuan* by about one-third. The rampant purchase of office also precipitated a major crisis in the traditional officialdom.<sup>7</sup>

In 1868, He Ruzhang passed the metropolitan examinations and achieved the *jinshi* 進士 title, which was the highest degree required to qualify for the most important positions in the Qing administration. He became a bachelor scholar of the Hanlin Academy (*shujishi* 庶吉士) and served as a compiler (*bianxiu* 編修) of the Qing veritable records.<sup>8</sup> By

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<sup>7</sup> For this estimate and other figures, see Marianne Bastid-Bruguier, "Currents of Social Change," in John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 11: Late Ch'ing, 1800–1911, Part 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 538. For the sale of office in Qing China, see Elisabeth Kaske, "Fund-Raising Wars: Office Selling and Interprovincial Finance in Nineteenth-Century China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 71, 1 (2011): 69–141; and 'The Price of an Office: Venality, the Individual, and the State in 19<sup>th</sup> Century China,' in Thomas Hirzel and Nanny Kim, eds., *Metals, Monies, and Markets in Early Modern Societies: East Asian and Global Perspectives* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008), 279–304.

<sup>8</sup> Wen Tingjing 溫廷敬, "Qing zhanshifu shaozhan Hegong zhuan" 清詹事府少詹何公傳 (A biography of Lord He, the Supervisor of the Household Administration of the Heir Apparent during the Qing dynasty), in Wu



attaining at least the low-ranking position of Hanlin bachelor, He Ruzhang had distinguished himself from the immensely huge pool of *gongsheng* and *shengyuan* graduates at the time and had the opportunity to reside in Beijing and enter the ranks of metropolitan officials (*jingguan* 京官). Spending years in Beijing could increase a man's status above his provincial origins and link him to a national network of colleagues.<sup>9</sup>

### *Joining the National Elite*

He Ruzhang became a part of the national elite by composing poems in the classical style practiced by adherents of the Tongcheng 桐城 School, which celebrated pre-Han essays and selected Tang-Song prose pieces for their moral content. Although the influence of the Tongcheng School declined after the Taiping Rebellion, it dominated the literary exchanges of poets and informed the writings of Hanlin academicians and high-ranking officials in Beijing.<sup>10</sup> Recognized for his compositions in the ancient style, He Ruzhang befriended the top ministers and Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872), whom he considered the leader of the Tongcheng School. Zeng Guofan was Li Hongzhang's mentor and had been instrumental in crushing the Taiping Rebellion. Zeng and Li created the most powerful

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Zhenqing 吳振清 and Wu Yuxian 吳裕賢, eds., *He Ruzhang ji* 何如璋集 (The collected writings of He Ruzhang) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2010), 379–380.

<sup>9</sup> Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 55–56.

<sup>10</sup> For the relationship between the Tongcheng School and Qing politics, see Zeng Guangguang 曾光光, *Tongcheng pai yu Qingdai xueshu liubian* 桐城派與清代學術流變 (The Tongcheng School and changes in Qing scholarship) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2016).

private secretariats (*mufu* 幕府) in post-Taiping China. They incubated *yitu* talent for “self-strengthening” (*zhiqiang* 自強)— “the policy of building up China’s military potential, chiefly by adopting Western technology so as to meet the challenge of external aggression.”<sup>11</sup> Through Zeng Guofan, He Ruzhang encountered the *yitu* officials who were Zeng’s staff assistants (*muliao* 幕僚).<sup>12</sup>

Unlike most Hanlin academicians and Tongcheng scholars, He Ruzhang shared an interest in foreign affairs and Western learning with Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang. Before he joined the Hanlin Academy, he had a basic grasp of foreign affairs through his interactions with British and American missionaries in Shanghai and Tianjin on several occasions en route to Beijing to sit for the metropolitan examinations, which he passed only on his fourth attempt. The sources are silent about the identities of these missionaries and the way in which they had shaped his worldview. At the very least, we know that he developed a spontaneous interest in foreign matters and did not disdain the West. His level of expertise was sufficient to impress Li Hongzhang, who was surprised that a Hanlin academician could be so knowledgeable about Western learning.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For this definition, see Kwang-Ching Liu, “Li Hung-chang in Chihli: The Emergence of a Policy, 1870–1875,” in *Li Hung-chang and China’s Early Modernization*, 49.

<sup>12</sup> Wen, “Qing zhanshifu shaozhan Hegong zhuan,” 380.

<sup>13</sup> Wu Daorong 吳道鎔, “He zhanshi jiazhuan” 何詹事家傳 (A biography of He Ruzhang’s family), in *He Ruzhang ji*, 377.

### *A Clash of Paths*

Although Li Hongzhang was a *zhengtu* bureaucrat coming from a literati background, he proved his practical ability in administrative and military work during the Taiping Rebellion under the command and patronage of Zeng Guofan. He was as much a Confucian as he was a patriot and pragmatist; apprised of Western power through adoption and observation, he sought new ways of preserving the monarchical and scholar-official order with a sense of realism and urgency.<sup>14</sup>

One such way was the expansion of the *yitu* route to recruit men who had performed exceptional or “meritorious military service” (*jungong* 軍功) and those who had the professional, specialized, or technical knowledge required to staff the Western-style arsenals, industries, and shipyards built by the Qing state after the Taiping Rebellion. Owing to his influence and pivotal role in directing self-strengthening reforms, Li Hongzhang helped to legitimate the *yitu* route. *Zhengtu* officials, who perceived their *yitu* colleagues as a threat to their own career advancement or rejected foreign models for restoring Chinese power, opposed Li Hongzhang’s programs of personnel training in industry and armament technology, so Li Hongzhang, at least in the beginning, had to depend on autodidacts or self-taught professionals to operate his arsenals and shipyards.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kwang-Ching Liu, “The Confucian as Patriot and Pragmatist: Li Hung-chang’s Formative Years, 1823–1866,” in *Li Hung-chang and China’s Early Modernization*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Liu, “Li Hung-chang in Chihli,” 49–75.

The issue of personnel also arose in the Qing state's preparations in the 1860s and 1870s to 'enter the world' and conduct modern diplomatic relations by hosting foreign representatives in China and dispatching Chinese legations to other countries. Some *zhengtu* bureaucrats resisted this new treatment of "barbarians," who according to them were obliged to submit regular tribute to the Chinese emperor and had never enjoyed permanent representation in China. Others opposed on the grounds that Qing legations might be held hostage should negotiations break down.

Under pressure from Western (especially British) diplomats, who argued (not without justification) that relations with China had been difficult due to the lack of mutual understanding and representation, the Qing state went ahead with preparing its legations. The question became who to send as Qing representatives. For many *zhengtu* bureaucrats, only the scholarly and morally upright Hanlin academicians could serve as diplomats or ministers to other countries, but most Hanlin academicians knew little about diplomacy and foreign affairs. *Yitu* bureaucrats and the more tolerant *zhengtu* officials argued that experts on foreign matters should be appointed even if they had not passed the civil service examinations; they were more concerned about how to fund the Qing legations. In view of such concerns, Robert Hart (1835–1911), a British diplomat who served as the Inspector-General of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, proposed that funds could be derived from the customs duties and trade taxes collected by his institution. Li Hongzhang joined the debate by arguing that Qing

legations could directly negotiate with rulers and parliaments in a dispute. He also suggested that the Qing diplomats and ministers who had resided abroad would acquire specialized knowledge and impart it to the Chinese upon their return.<sup>16</sup>

### *He Ruzhang in Japan*

The Qing court, under the effective control of Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908), accepted Li Hongzhang’s explanation. The Zongli Yamen, established in 1861 for managing foreign affairs inside China and interpreting foreign treaties for China’s ratification, was ordered to recommend suitable men for appointment to legations. Nevertheless, the Zongli Yamen, led by Wenxiang 文祥 (1818–1876) and Prince Gong 恭親王 (1833–1898), usually consulted Li Hongzhang about nominees for appointment and deferred to his selections. Li Hongzhang could wield considerable influence in handling foreign affairs because as the Northern Superintendent of Trade at the ports of Tianjin, Dengzhou (later Yantai), and Niuzhuang (later Yingkou), he helped to finance the Qing legations abroad from foreign customs dues and ship tonnage dues collected at these ports. From his official capacity, he understood the workings of customs services and diplomatic negotiations; by

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<sup>16</sup> For the debates, see Ren Yunxian’s 任雲仙 articles “19 shiji 60 niandai moqi Zhongguo waijiao guannian tanxi” 19 世紀 60 年代末期中國外交觀念探析 (A discussion of diplomatic views in late 1860s China), *Shehui kexue jikan* 社會科學輯刊 160, no. 5 (2005): 150–155; and “Wan Qing zhuwai shichen de qunti goucheng yu zhishi jiegou” 晚清駐外使臣的群體構成與知識結構 (The group composition and knowledge structure of late Qing legations), *Guizhou shehui kexue* 貴州社會科學 195, no. 3 (2005): 138–143. For a dated yet relevant study, see Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *China’s Entrance into the Family of Nations: The Diplomatic Phase, 1858–1880* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 149–198.

default, he was rightly assumed to know how diplomacy worked and who the Chinese specialists on foreign affairs were. His involvement with foreign matters aided his transition from a provincial official to a metropolitan bureaucrat who could help devise national policies and, authorized by the Zongli Yamen, represent the Qing court in negotiating with foreign diplomats.<sup>17</sup> In 1875, Li Hongzhang recommended He Ruzhang to be China's first minister to Japan. Approved by the Zongli Yamen, He Ruzhang was duly appointed in 1877 and left for Tokyo later that year.

For many *zhengtu* bureaucrats, serving as a minister to other countries involved a long trip and a hard life, and residing for years in a foreign, "barbaric" land could be a corrupting influence and demeaning experience. An unsuitable man would disgrace the Qing state or fall prey to foreign deceit. The record is silent about why Li Hongzhang recommended He Ruzhang for the position of minister to Japan, apart from the fact that he was impressed with the latter's grasp of foreign affairs. But as he confided in his nephew and adopted son Li Jingfang 李經方 (1855–1934) years later, he understood that although the Meiji government of Japan despised ancient Chinese learning, many Japanese literati remained fond of Chinese essays and poems, so an official skilled in the art of classical writing might serve as minister

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<sup>17</sup> For Li Hongzhang's scope of influence in relation to foreign affairs, see Liu, "Li Hung-chang in Chihli," 49–75; and Jennifer M. Rudolph, *Negotiated Power in Late Imperial China: The Zongli Yamen and the Politics of Reform* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2008), 101–131. Foreign diplomats had the habit of meeting Li Hongzhang before proceeding to Beijing to "get a sense of China's sentiment by the substance and tenor of Li's statements," cementing Li Hongzhang's status as an indispensable figure in Qing diplomacy. See Samuel C. Chu, "Li Hung-chang: An Assessment," in *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization*, 269–270.

to Japan and socialize better with Japanese scholars.<sup>18</sup> He Ruzhang's Tongcheng writings and mastery of the Confucian classics allowed him to overcome his inability to speak Japanese and conduct an informal form of diplomacy through brush conversations or written exchanges in literary Chinese with educated Japanese who had received some form of classical training; he was thus a literati-diplomat.<sup>19</sup>

As the minister to Japan, He Ruzhang could pick his own attachés and specialist assistants (*muyou* 幕友). This was an early indication that the Zongli Yamen lacked a comprehensive, long-term plan for recruiting and training personnel for legations abroad.<sup>20</sup> He Ruzhang's legation staff, who were expected to leave Japan with him at the end of his three-year tenure, included Huang Zunxian, a famous poet and expectant official (*houbu* 候補) who finally received his first official appointment, and other talented literati who were skilled in calligraphy, poetry, and prose but had not attained the *jinshi* title.<sup>21</sup> The literati-diplomats under He Ruzhang were, in a way, *yitu* officials, unique for their kind because their forte remained grounded in classical studies rather than Western knowledge. Despite his knowledge of foreign affairs, He Ruzhang and, for that matter, the Zongli Yamen thought that

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<sup>18</sup> Li Hongzhang 李鴻章, in Gu Tinglong 顧廷龍 and Dai Yi 戴逸, eds., *Li Hongzhang quanji* 李鴻章全集 (The complete works of Li Hongzhang), Vol. 35 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008), 111.

<sup>19</sup> Reynolds, *East Meets East*, 99–125.

<sup>20</sup> Li Wenjie 李文傑, *Zhongguo jindai waijiaoguan qunti de xingcheng (1861–1911)* 中國近代外交官群體的形成 (1861–1911) (The emergence of modern Chinese diplomats: officials in the Zongli Yamen, Waiwu Bu, and Legations, 1861–1911) (Beijing: Sanlian, 2016), 282.

<sup>21</sup> For the expectant officials, see Xiao Zongzhi 肖宗志, *Houbu wenguan qunti yu wan Qing zhengzhi* 候補文官群體與晚清政治 (The expectant official cohort and late Qing politics) (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2007).

Japan had switched to using English after the Meiji reforms. The few English interpreters he brought were found to be useless upon arrival, and he had to employ new interpreters in Japan.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the Japanese literati's generally positive reception of He Ruzhang's brush conversations and his entourage's expertise in literary writing apparently proved that his mission to gain respect for China and Chinese culture remained valid.<sup>23</sup>

He Ruzhang's "success," despite the Ryukyu debacle that we will come to, set the precedent of cultured, well published Chinese literati-officials serving as China's ministers to Japan. For many *zhengtu* bureaucrats and even Li Hongzhang, the idea that He Ruzhang and subsequent diplomats and ministers to Japan were cultural celebrities living among less sophisticated Japanese justified staffing the Qing legation in Tokyo with such personnel. While He Ruzhang managed to cultivate harmonious relations with the Japanese literati, he enjoyed little interaction with the ministers and politicians of the Meiji government. His legation was more like a cultural office than a diplomatic institution, unable to fulfill its other objectives as intended by Li Hongzhang and the Qing court—to observe Japan's modernization and befriend the key leaders of the Meiji reforms. His apparent lack of friends

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<sup>22</sup> Li, *Zhongguo jindai waijiaoguan qunti de xingcheng*, 351.

<sup>23</sup> For a list and description of He Ruzhang's staff in Japan, see Reynolds, *East Meets East*, 99–101.



or even acquaintances in the Meiji leadership had diminished Qing diplomatic efforts, as Japan's annexation of Ryukyu would show.<sup>24</sup>

### **Qing Legations, Li Hongzhang, and the Zongli Yamen**

He Ruzhang's assignment was part of the Qing ratification of the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty, which was signed in 1871 and provided for the exchange of envoys between China and Japan. For Li Hongzhang, the dispatch of He Ruzhang was overdue. Had he been sent earlier, Li Hongzhang reasoned, the 1874 Formosa Incident, which saw Japan launch a punitive military expedition to Taiwan to avenge the aborigines' slaughter of shipwrecked Ryukyuan sailors, might have concluded in China's favor. At the very least, China's minister to Japan could have helped dissuade Japan's political leaders from launching the expedition, negotiated with the Meiji emperor and his advisers directly, and warned the Qing government of Japan's actions in advance so that preparations could be made.<sup>25</sup> Qing legations abroad were thus designed to transmit timely information to metropolitan institutions and officials. The minister memorialized directly to the court on important matters and the court issued him instructions without going through the Zongli Yamen, which

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<sup>24</sup> Li, *Zhongguo jindai waijiaoguan qunti de xingcheng*, 260. For He Ruzhang's interactions with Japanese literati, see He Ruzhang, "Yu Ribenren bitan" 與日本人筆談 (Brush conversations with the Japanese), in *He Ruzhang ji*, 298–374.

<sup>25</sup> Li Hongzhang, *Li Wenzhong gong quanshu: zougao* 李文忠公全書: 奏稿 (The collected writings of Li Hongzhang: memorials), *juan* 24 (Jinling: unknown publisher, 1905), 26–28. See also Dong Weimin 董為民, Yin Zhaolu 殷昭魯, and Zhang Sheng 張生, eds., *Qingji Liuqiu jiaoshe dang'an* 清季琉球交涉檔案 (Archival materials concerning the negotiations over Ryukyu during the Qing period) (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2016), 310.

concerned itself only with affairs related to foreigners in China. The court's orders, prepared by the Grand Council, were sent through the Board of War (*bingbu* 兵部) to Li Hongzhang, who then transmitted them to the minister. The Zongli Yamen, originally established as an ad hoc, temporary division of the Grand Council, was bypassed. Unless the court deferred to it, the Zongli Yamen had no way of knowing the contents of communications between the court and the legations. The Zongli Yamen and the legations were parallel institutions, one inside and the other outside China; neither had hierarchical superiority over the other. Unlike Western foreign offices, the Zongli Yamen was not responsible for supervising the legations or mediating their communications with the court; it could merely petition the court to instruct them.<sup>26</sup>

That said, the legations could choose to go through the Zongli Yamen should they want to keep it in the loop, especially for non-essential matters that the court would delegate to the Zongli Yamen to settle anyway. When He Ruzhang first assumed office, telegraph lines between Tokyo and Beijing had yet to be laid, so he had to conduct all correspondence through letters ferried by steamships under Li Hongzhang's charge.<sup>27</sup> He Ruzhang often addressed his reports to both Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen. In practice, he and the other Qing legations were under Li Hongzhang's command. Li Hongzhang believed that he

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<sup>26</sup> Hsu, *China's Entrance into the Family of Nations*, 193–194.

<sup>27</sup> Dai, *Wan Qing zhu Ri shituan yu Jiawu zhanqian de Zhong Ri guanxi*, 3–4.

understood Sino-Japanese relations better than the Zongli Yamen ministers; he was the one who concluded the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Friendship without the most-favored-nation clause, which he regarded as one of his great diplomatic achievements.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, Li Hongzhang had many political rivals, most of whom were *zhengtu* and the so-called *qingyi* 清議 (pure discussion) bureaucrats highly critical of his self-strengthening programs and conciliatory foreign policies. To complicate matters, Zongli Yamen ministers had not always sided with Li Hongzhang for fear of offending the sensibilities of *zhengtu* scholar-officials—Prince Gong’s eventual refusal to support Li Hongzhang’s proposal to create a new category in the civil service examinations for candidates specializing in Western technology was a case in point.<sup>29</sup> The Qing court under Cixi was known to play one faction against another and seek consensus from its ministers before finalizing its decisions, so Li Hongzhang did not enjoy a free hand in deciding specific policies.<sup>30</sup>

That neither Li Hongzhang nor the Zongli Yamen had the complete power of a modern or Western foreign ministry—they had to share the power to determine Qing foreign

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<sup>28</sup> Leung, “Li Hung-chang and the Liu-ch’iu (Ryukyu) Controversy,” 170–171.

<sup>29</sup> Chu, “Li Hung-chang: An Assessment,” 271.

<sup>30</sup> Lloyd E. Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins: China’s Search for a Policy during the Sino-French Controversy, 1880–1885* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). More recent Chinese scholarship suggests that the division between Qingliu 清流 (“Pure Stream”), a loose group of *qingyi* adherents, and Yangwu 洋務 (“Western Affairs,” or self-strengtheners with a knowledge of foreign matters), was not as rigid as assumed by previous research; Qing officials could not be easily pigeonholed as belonging to either the Qingliu or Yangwu faction. See Wang Weijiang 王維江, “*Qingliu*” *yanjiu* “清流” 研究 (A study of “Qingliu”) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2009).

policy with the southern superintendent of trade and the governors-general of the coastal provinces—meant that the formulation and execution of foreign policy was consultative at best and inconsistent at worst, subject to court politics and the opinions of several policymakers.<sup>31</sup> Ambitious expectant officials and *zhengtu* bureaucrats, worried that returnees from diplomatic service abroad might compete with them for rank and positions via the recommendations of Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen, had condemned *yitu* officials, members of the Zongli Yamen, and legation staff for ingratiating themselves with foreigners, serving the barbarians, and collaborating with the enemy. After 1884, Li Hongzhang became “a suppressor of non-Sinocentric reports from Japan,” or reports that did not conform to the Confucian ideas of cosmological kingship and Chinese superiority.<sup>32</sup>

Even the Zongli Yamen secretaries (*zhangjing* 章京), who held concurrent positions as junior officials at key metropolitan offices after passing the Zongli Yamen’s recruitment examinations and would rotate back to their home agencies to win promotions into the regular bureaucracy, viewed the diplomats and ministers posted overseas as competitors for scarce official appointments at home and accused them of being disloyal and unreliable.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Chu, “Li Hung-chang: An Assessment,” 269–271. For a flowchart that depicts Zongli Yamen’s place in the Qing administrative structure, see Rudolph, *Negotiated Power in Late Imperial China*, 106.

<sup>32</sup> Reynolds, *East Meets East*, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> This was the situation during He Ruzhang’s stay in Japan. Reynolds, *East Meets East*, 30–40; and 412. For the anxieties of Zongli Yamen secretaries, see Li Wenjie 李文傑, “Wan Qing Zongli Yamen de zhangjing kaoshi: jianlun keju zhidu xia waijiaoguan de xuanren” 晚清總理衙門的章京考試：兼論科舉制度下外交官的選任 (The late Qing Zongli Yamen examinations for *zhangjing* candidates: with a discussion of diplomatic appointments under the imperial examination system), *Jindai shi yanjiu* 近代史研究, no. 2 (2011): 107–123.

The court's destruction of the "heretical" diary of China's first minister to Britain, Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾 (1818–1891), might explain why He Ruzhang's reports and personal writings recorded little of Japan's reforms for China's reference.<sup>34</sup>

## **Japan's Annexation of Ryukyu**

### *Aiding the Ryukyuan*

In Tokyo, He Ruzhang met with Ryukyuan officials who requested the Qing court's intervention in Japan's termination of Ryukyu's tributary relations with China and its plans to annex the Ryukyu islands. Some Ryukyuan officials also sought help from the Fujian governor He Jing 何璟 (1817–1888) and naval commander Ding Richang 丁日昌 (1823–1882), who reported Japan's actions to the court. He Jing and Ding Richang then asked He Ruzhang to negotiate with the Japanese government in response to Ryukyu's distress call.<sup>35</sup> The court also tasked He Ruzhang with investigating the issue.<sup>36</sup>

After consulting with Ryukyuan officials in Tokyo and reading their documents and letters, He Ruzhang was convinced that Japan's abrogation of Ryukyu's status as a kingdom was the first step toward annexation. The Ryukyuan had appealed to the Qing court and

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<sup>34</sup> For Guo Songtao's plight, see Hsu, *China's Entrance into the Family of Nations*, 186–190; 201.

<sup>35</sup> See Gugong bowuyuan 故宫博物院, ed., *Qing Guangxu chao Zhong Ri jiaoshe shiliao* 清光緒朝中日交涉史料 (Historical sources on Sino-Japanese negotiations during the Qing Guangxu reign), *juan 1* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1963), 11.

<sup>36</sup> *Qing Guangxu chao Zhong Ri jiaoshe shiliao*, *juan 1*, 21–25.

Fujian authorities, which were responsible for arranging Ryukyuan tribute and matters related to Ryukyu, since 1872 and finally received attention from He Ruzhang.

### *The Four Reasons*

He Ruzhang listed four reasons why Japan could not risk a military confrontation with China over Ryukyu: 1) Japan was no larger than China's southernmost provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi combined and enjoyed a revenue no larger than that of the Wu region of southeast China; 2) Japan faced economic difficulties and needed to sell government bonds to pay its foreign debt; 3) Japan's land forces and naval personnel were numerically inferior to China's, and the warships imported from Britain were no match for the ironclad Qing battleships; and 4) the samurai and military men were demoralized and impoverished by the Meiji reforms. He Ruzhang cautioned that if the Qing court failed to defend Ryukyu quickly, the next country to fall could be Korea. He Ruzhang urged that the Qing court take on the Japanese before they became too powerful.

Moreover, He Ruzhang argued, Japan could invade Taiwan from Ryukyu and threaten China's military positions in Fujian and other southeastern provinces. He thus concluded that China had no reason not to intervene on Ryukyu's behalf.<sup>37</sup> Historian Dai Dongyang concurred with Qing-Republican literatus Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) when she

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<sup>37</sup> Wen Tingjing 溫廷敬, *Chayang sanjia wenchao/ He shaozhan wenchao* 茶陽三家文鈔/ 何少詹文鈔 (Literary works of three authors of Dapu county/ The writings of He Ruzhang), in *He Ruzhang ji*, 95–96.

argued that He Ruzhang's reports might have been drafted or inspired by Huang Zunxian, given the reports' similarities in style and tone with Huang's subsequent writings.<sup>38</sup> It was nonetheless He Ruzhang who endorsed and forwarded Huang Zunxian's suggestions to the Qing court.

### *The Three Strategies*

He Ruzhang proposed three strategies to Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen. According to He Ruzhang, the best strategy was to negotiate with the Japanese government and send warships to force Ryukyu to resume its tribute. This show of force would dissuade the Japanese from further actions in Ryukyu. The "middle" strategy was to continue talks with Japan and guarantee military protection to Ryukyu if the Japanese were to attack—the joint forces of China and Ryukyu could compel Japan to pursue peace. The worst strategy required the Qing court to escalate the issue by inviting interventions from major foreign powers and invoking international law so that Japanese leaders might succumb to diplomatic pressure and reconsider their options. He Ruzhang also had a "no-action" strategy, which was not truly a strategy from his perspective: the Qing court could disregard Ryukyu's appeals and allow Japan to annex the kingdom, conscript the Ryukyuans, and jeopardize the security of Fujian and surrounding provinces.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Dai, *Wan Qing zhu Ri shituan yu Jiawu zhanqian de Zhong Ri guanxi*, 5–6; 23.

<sup>39</sup> Wen, *Chayang sanjia wenchao*, 96–97.

While Li Hongzhang believed that China was militarily unprepared to challenge Japan, He Ruzhang argued that China was more than a match for Japan. He Ruzhang suggested that the key to success in defending Ryukyu lay in a display of military strength. For him, diplomacy unsupported by the threat of force was ineffective. His views contradicted the aims and priorities of Li Hongzhang, who sought to appease Japan and strike an alliance against the menacing Russians across the Manchurian border.

Concerned that Li Hongzhang and the Qing court might dislike his aggressive approach, He Ruzhang suggested two alternatives based on his three strategies: 1) convince the major Western powers that Japan's actions in Ryukyu, which was located along the busy trade routes between China and Japan, could hurt their interests in East Asia; and 2) demand that Japan cede some territories to China in exchange for Ryukyu so that Japan might refuse and abandon its plans to annex Ryukyu. He urged that the Qing court exercise these alternatives only if no other options were available (*wuke naihe zhi banfa* 無可奈何之辦法). For him, the display of strong resolve by military means remained the most ideal solution.<sup>40</sup>

Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen did not fully agree with He Ruzhang. Li Hongzhang replied that while he deemed Japan's termination of Ryukyu's tribute to China unreasonable, the Qing navy—or his Beiyang fleet to be specific—was not ready to attack Japan or rescue Ryukyu. Li Hongzhang advised He Ruzhang to refer to the articles of the

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<sup>40</sup> Wen, *Chayang sanjia wenchao*, 97.



Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty in his correspondence with Japanese officials. He also suggested that the Zongli Yamen and the Board of Rites, which was responsible for managing tributary missions, could be requested to compile records of visits by Ryukyuan envoys and establish the historical relationship between China and Ryukyu.<sup>41</sup> The Zongli Yamen responded that He Ruzhang's proposals might make the Qing court appear unnecessarily aggressive. It preferred offering more discreet assistance to Ryukyu because Japan had not provoked China since its military expedition to Taiwan; taking up arms might strain China's relationship with Japan. The Zongli Yamen endorsed Li Hongzhang's assessment and recommended the policy of appeasement and the use of conciliatory approaches to resolve the Ryukyu crisis. The Qing court adopted its suggestion. The Qing court, Li Hongzhang, and the Zongli Yamen agreed that Ryukyu was not sufficiently crucial to Chinese interests to warrant a military intervention.<sup>42</sup>

### *The Negotiations*

With Li Hongzhang's blessing, He Ruzhang appealed to the United States for assistance, hoping that the American government would intercede on China's behalf and force Japan to relent. He visited the American consulate with Ryukyuan officials and

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<sup>41</sup> Li Hongzhang, *Li Wenzhong gong quanshu: yishu hanguo* 李文忠公全書: 譯署函稿 (The collected writings of Li Hongzhang: letters with the Translation Bureau), *juan* 8 (Jinling: unknown publisher, 1905), 4–6. See also *Qingji Liuqiu jiaoshe dang'an*, 312–313.

<sup>42</sup> *Qing Guangxu chao Zhong Ri jiaoshe shiliao*, *juan* 1, 24–25. See also Li Hongzhang, *Li Wenzhong gong quanshu: yishu hangao*, *juan* 8, 1–2.

submitted a joint petition for help to the American minister to Japan, who agreed to transmit it to the American government.<sup>43</sup> Later, in September 1878, He Ruzhang visited the Japanese foreign ministry, where he met with foreign minister Terashima Munemori 寺島宗則 (1832–1893) and argued that the Japanese government should allow Ryukyu to resume its tributary missions to China. Terashima Munemori insisted that Ryukyu belonged to Japan. For him, the Ryukyu issue was strictly Japan's internal affair.<sup>44</sup>

In October 1878, He Ruzhang wrote to the Japanese government, stating that Ryukyu had sent tribute to China since the fourteenth century and, as a sovereign kingdom, signed treaties with the United States, France, and the Netherlands earlier in the nineteenth century. These countries recognized Ryukyu's relationship with China and its use of the Chinese calendar and Chinese script. For He Ruzhang, Japan's cessation of Ryukyu's tribute to China had been "disingenuous, unrighteous, hardhearted, and unreasonable" (*buxin buyi wuqing wuli* 不信不義無情無理). By coercing Ryukyu, which had paid tribute to China for centuries, Japan had defied the spirit of the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty. Japan also risked international censure by its disregard of diplomatic conventions and international law. He Ruzhang concluded that Japan had breached the principles of *qingli* 情理 (propriety) and *xinyi* 信義 (morality) by behaving aggressively toward Ryukyu.<sup>45</sup> Although

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<sup>43</sup> Wang Yanwei 王彥威, *Qingji waijiao shiliao* 清季外交史料 (Historical materials on Qing foreign relations), *juan* 15 (Beijing: Wang Xiyin, 1932), 11–13.

<sup>44</sup> Leung, "Li Hung-chang and the Liu-ch'iu Controversy," 167.

<sup>45</sup> Yu, *He Ruzhang zhuan*, 33–34.

he heeded Li Hongzhang's suggestion by protesting through diplomatic channels, he based his argument on Confucian principles; the professionalization of the modern Qing diplomat had not yet occurred.<sup>46</sup>

For Terashima Munemori, He Ruzhang's letter was inappropriate and detrimental to Sino-Japanese relations. Mori Arinori 森有禮 (1847–1889), Japan's minister to China, sent an official complaint to the Qing court through the Zongli Yamen. The Japanese government wanted a public apology from He Ruzhang, but He Ruzhang would only retract the letter and discuss his alleged breach of diplomatic protocol after Japan allowed Ryukyu to continue its tribute to China. In March 1879, He Ruzhang received news that Japanese troops had entered Ryukyu. He raised the issue with Ito Hirobumi 伊藤博文 (1841–1909), Japan's minister of home affairs. Ito Hirobumi assured him that the dispatch of troops was not a precursor to annexing Ryukyu. He Ruzhang then visited Terashima Munemori, who replied that events in Ryukyu were beyond his control.<sup>47</sup>

Exasperated, He Ruzhang suggested to the Zongli Yamen that the Qing government should strengthen coastal defenses and withdraw him from Japan in protest. But in April 1879, the Japanese government announced the creation of Okinawa Prefecture and formally annexed Ryukyu. He Ruzhang urged the Qing court to consider military intervention and

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<sup>46</sup> Li, "Wan Qing Zongli Yamen de zhangjing kaoshi," 107–123.

<sup>47</sup> Wang, *Qingji waijiao shiliao*, juan 15, 11–13.

asked Li Hongzhang to pull the Qing legation out of Japan in retaliation.<sup>48</sup> The Zongli Yamen stepped in to advise the Qing court against straining Sino-Japanese relations.<sup>49</sup> Li Hongzhang favored recalling He Ruzhang and arranged for him to lead subsequent negotiations.<sup>50</sup>

In the end, a compromise was struck. The Qing court ordered He Ruzhang to remain at his post but issued a statement condemning Japan's actions and warned that it might break diplomatic relations if Japan did not revoke the annexation. He Ruzhang hoped that tensions would escalate. He believed that Japan had little capacity for prolonged warfare and that such a war would result in domestic opposition. He maintained that the combined forces of China, Korea, and Ryukyu could defeat the Japanese. Japan would become stronger, he suggested, so China had to curb its growth before it was too late.<sup>51</sup>

He Ruzhang proposed involving the United States in the arbitration. He argued that while the Americans had not responded to the annexation, they were sympathetic to Ryukyu. Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen agreed. When the former American President Ulysses S. Grant (1822–1885) arrived in China during his world tour, he was asked to mediate between China and Japan.<sup>52</sup> In Japan, Grant met with Japanese officials who insisted that He Ruzhang

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<sup>48</sup> Li Hongzhang, *Li Wenzhong gong quanshu: yishu hangao*, 25–26.

<sup>49</sup> Wang, *Qingji waijiao shiliao*, juan 15, 11–13.

<sup>50</sup> Li, *Li Wenzhong gong quanshu: yishu hangao*, juan 8, 25–26.

<sup>51</sup> Wen, *Chayang sanjia wenchao*, 98–99.

<sup>52</sup> Li, *Li Wenzhong gong quanshu: yishu hangao*, juan 8, 40–41.

was inept at the art of diplomacy and had used offensive language in his letters. Japanese diplomats also reassured Grant and the British, Dutch, and French ministers to Japan that they would honor the treaties their governments had signed with Ryukyu. By making this promise, Japan had effectively asserted its sovereignty over Ryukyu.<sup>53</sup> In the end, Grant left Japan without mentioning the reestablishment of Ryukyu as a sovereign kingdom. In his subsequent letters to Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen, Grant insinuated that He Ruzhang's strongly worded letter to Terashima Munemori and stubborn refusal to retract it impeded meaningful discussion regarding Ryukyu.<sup>54</sup>

### *The Outcomes*

Luckily for He Ruzhang, Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen understood Grant's letters as a polite refusal to intervene. As mentioned by Li Hongzhang in a letter to Grant's companion, John Russell Young (1840–1899), the Japanese were using He Ruzhang's letter to shift the blame for diplomatic failure to the Chinese.<sup>55</sup> He Ruzhang refused to regard Ryukyu as a lost cause. In the winter of 1879, he requested Li Hongzhang to withdraw the Qing legation and cease all relations to force Japan's hand.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Huang Tian 黃天, *Liuqiu Chongsheng jiaoti kao: Diaoyudao guishu xunyuan zhi yi* 琉球沖繩交替考: 釣魚島歸屬尋源之一 (A study of Ryukyu's transformation into Okinawa: on the origins of the sovereignty of the Diaoyu islands) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2016), 187–241.

<sup>54</sup> Li, *Li Wenzhong gong quanshu: yishu hangao*, juan 9, 39–41.

<sup>55</sup> Li, *Li Wenzhong gong quanshu: yishu hangao*, juan 10, 3–4.

<sup>56</sup> Wen, *Chayang sanjia wenchao*, 111.

He Ruzhang's proposal was dismissed. By 1880, a new threat had risen on the Qing borders. Although Qing armies resumed control of Qing Central Asia (Xinjiang, or the 'New Territories') by suppressing the Dungan Revolt (1862–1877), unrest continued, and the Russian troops sent to aid the rebels remained. Russia also had territorial ambitions on Korea and Manchuria. Disillusioned with Japan for annexing Ryukyu and convinced that the combined military strength of China and Japan could not match Russia's, Li Hongzhang was loath to yield concessions to both Japan and Russia. Nevertheless, he maintained that military action against Japan would be counterproductive.<sup>57</sup>

At He Ruzhang's suggestion, he proposed carving Ryukyu into three: the Amami archipelago would go to Japan; the Miyako and Yaeyama Islands to China, and the main island of Okinawa to a restored Ryukyu kingdom.<sup>58</sup> Hearing nothing from the Japanese, He Ruzhang urged Li Hongzhang to propose the partition of Ryukyu into two, one part for China and the other for Japan. The Qing court could invite Ryukyu's deposed king to the territories ceded to China and restore his kingdom there.<sup>59</sup>

In August 1880, the Japanese representative arrived in Beijing to negotiate with Prince Gong, who agreed on behalf of the Qing court to grant Japan the most-favored-nation clause and trading privileges in exchange for two southern islands of Ryukyu; Japan would

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<sup>57</sup> Key-Hiuk Kim, "The Aims of Li Hung-chang's Policies toward Japan and Korea, 1870–1882," in *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization*, 156.

<sup>58</sup> *Qingji Liuqiu jiaoshe dang'an*, 346–347.

<sup>59</sup> Yu, *He Ruzhang zhuan*, 46–48.

keep the rest of Ryukyu. Li Hongzhang rejected the draft treaty and opposed its ratification.

He believed that it was unwise that the Qing court would offer Japan the most-favored-nation clause over Ryukyu, which for him was too small and insignificant for China to make this concession.<sup>60</sup>

As Edwin Pak-wah Leung suggests, Li Hongzhang might have opposed the 1880 draft treaty to embarrass the Zongli Yamen. Having concluded the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Friendship and worked with He Ruzhang for months to resolve the Ryukyu issue, Li Hongzhang was perhaps frustrated that he was not tasked to negotiate with the Japanese. Because of the strong opposition mobilized by Li Hongzhang, the Qing court did not ratify the draft treaty.<sup>61</sup>

Although Leung suggests that the 1880 negotiations marked the end of serious Qing involvement in the Ryukyu issue, recent Chinese scholarship, especially by Dai Dongyang, reveals a more complex development. He Ruzhang's successors, who were literati-diplomats like him, had tried to reopen negotiations over Ryukyu with the Japanese government. They continued to scour historical records in order to prove that Ryukyu was a sovereign kingdom independent of direct Japanese rule. They proposed dividing the Ryukyu archipelago so that the Qing court could help reestablish the kingdom on the islands relinquished by Japan.

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<sup>60</sup> Leung, "Li Hung-chang and the Liu-ch'iu (Ryukyu) Controversy," 167–168.

<sup>61</sup> Leung, "Li Hung-chang and the Liu-ch'iu (Ryukyu) Controversy," 171.

Although they no longer took a militant stand, they repeatedly broached the Ryukyu issue at every opportunity and insisted that truly cordial relations between China and Japan could never materialize if Ryukyu were to remain under Japanese control.

In short, ministers to Japan who served after He Ruzhang adopted his ideas and general approach to the Ryukyu issue. For them, the Ryukyu issue remained unresolved. They continued to pressurize the Japanese government, often without the support or even knowledge of Li Hongzhang, the Zongli Yamen, or their metropolitan colleagues.<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

He Ruzhang, like other literati-diplomats and ministers to Japan, was a traditional scholar-official concerned about the breakdown of the Sinocentric tributary order, which would dissolve the notion of Confucian cosmological kingship that involved imperial rituals and spectacles of submission by “men from afar” to the emperor in exchange for gifts, investitures, and military protection. In retrospect, their concerns were not unfounded. Japan’s annexation of Ryukyu was a precursor to the disintegration of the Chinese tributary system, which ended with Japan’s removal of Korea from Qing vassalage after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). The example of He Ruzhang demonstrates how far *zhengtu* bureaucrats were willing to go to fulfil their objective of preserving the Chinese world order.

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<sup>62</sup> Dai, *Wan Qing zhu Ri shituan yu Jiawu zhanqian de Zhong Ri guanxi*, 9. Dai Dongyang may understand more about China’s ministers to Japan because she has made extensive use of sources from Japanese archives and libraries, many of which are previously untapped.



It bears remembering that the appointment of the minister to Japan and all legation positions were an extra-bureaucratic function outside the purview of the Board of Personnel (*libu* 吏部) and its system of rewards and bureaucratic promotions. He Ruzhang's militant stand and valiant efforts to defend Ryukyu and the tributary system might have spared him from the criticisms customarily leveled at Li Hongzhang and "heretical" diplomats and self-strengtheners, but conservative metropolitan officials were surprisingly silent about Japan's annexation of Ryukyu; such officials were more vocal about the subsequent management of events in Vietnam that led to the Sino-French War. He Ruzhang did what he could for Ryukyu out of cultural convictions rather than career motivations. Shielded from competition for rank and position by his ties with Li Hongzhang—he was soon appointed minister at the Fuzhou Naval Yard—He Ruzhang had little need to distinguish himself in diplomatic service for perks and preferment.<sup>63</sup>

Compared to the uniformity of purpose seen in He Ruzhang and his successors' defense of Ryukyuan sovereignty and the Chinese tributary system, the Qing court did not pursue a concerted policy toward Ryukyu. Its responses to Japan's activities in Ryukyu, and those of Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen, were stimulated by He Ruzhang, who was

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<sup>63</sup> Wu Zhenqing 吳振清 and Wu Yuxian 吳裕賢, eds., 'He Ruzhang zhuanji ziliao' 何如璋傳記資料 (Materials on the biography of He Ruzhang), in *He Ruzhang ji*, 399. As described by Douglas R. Reynolds, He Ruzhang was frustrated with the Qing court's weak response to Japan's annexation of Ryukyu and supported the self-strengthening policies. However, for lack of proper training, he helped bring about the destruction of the Fuzhou Naval Yard by the French during the Sino-French War—a major disaster and humiliation for China. See Reynolds, *East Meets East*, 36; 117–120.

more anxious than any metropolitan official to reestablish Ryukyu's tributary relationship with China and restore the Ryukyu Kingdom. However, He Ruzhang's efforts were frustrated by Li Hongzhang and the Zongli Yamen ministers, who agreed that Ryukyu and the tributary order it symbolized were inconsequential but had at times disagreed over the finer details of resolving the Ryukyu issue. Although in principle He Ruzhang was directly answerable to the Qing court—specifically, to the emperor—power had become so diffused in late Qing political culture that in practice he could choose to report to either Li Hongzhang or the Zongli Yamen, or both.

In the end, He Ruzhang directed most of his reports to Li Hongzhang, his political patron and fellow *zhengtu* bureaucrat who, despite his non-militant approach, was less willing than the Zongli Yamen to yield excessive concessions to Japan. While the late Qing state's new institutions created more opportunities for careerist officials and accommodated the wide interests of *zhengtu* scholar-officials, *yitu* bureaucrats, and the Manchu aristocracy, their policymaking and system of appointments were susceptible to factionalism and political rivalry. This might help explain why, from an institutional perspective, the Qing court could only act passively on He Ruzhang's reports and respond indecisively to Japan's annexation of Ryukyu. He Ruzhang's frustration with the bureaucracy would be shared by his friend Deng Chengxiu, to whom we shall now turn.

## Chapter Two: Deng Chengxiu and Sino-French Border Negotiations

### Introduction

During the late Qing dynasty (1644–1912), even decades before the civil service examinations which helped select candidates educated in the Confucian classics for office were abolished in 1905, traditional officialdom faced a constitutional and ideological crisis. The principles described in the Confucian canonical texts comprised the Qing constitution, including the Four Books and Five Classics 四書五經, *Qing Institutes* (*Da Qing huidian* 大清會典), and all administrative, criminal, and legal precedents of the Qing. These written records defined the cosmological underpinnings and formal jurisdiction of the powers held by the monarch, the courtiers and officials, and the people.

But by the mid-nineteenth century, these principles no longer mattered due to the Taiping Tianguo 太平天國 (1850–1864), a civil war which devastated the southern half of China and introduced provincial governors who recruited Yangwu 洋務 pragmatist officials (or self-strengtheners) who were more well-acquainted with Western affairs than were moralists trying to rebuild the empire.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For information regarding the “constitutional” framework of Qing China, see Benjamin A. Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch’ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Qing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 276; Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); William T. Rowe, “Rewriting the Qing Constitution: Bao Shichen’s ‘On Wealth’ (*Shuochu*),” *T’oung Pao* 98, nos. 1-3 (2012): 178-216. For information regarding the differences between traditional scholar-officials and new-style technocratic officials, see Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning, 1890–1911* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987); Kenneth E. Folsom, *Friends, Guests, and Colleagues: The Mu-Fu System in the Late Ch’ing Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Jonathan Porter, *Tseng Kuo-fan’s Private Bureaucracy* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California Press, 1972).

To complicate matters over the course of the nineteenth century, the sale and purchase of offices (*juanna* 捐納) became an ever-growing problem for office-seekers on the “regular path” (*zhengtu* 正途) of the civil service examinations. From 1850 to 1911, the proportion of officials who received their posts without following the regular route rose from 50 percent to some two-thirds. After suppressing the Taiping Rebellion, the Qing court compensated the gentry for their wartime contribution by raising the quota of students who could pass the licensing examinations and receive *shengyuan* 生員 status. This situation increased the *shengyuan* holders by about one-third. The purchase of office became rampant, exacerbating the crisis.<sup>2</sup>

These events did not escape the traditional scholar-officials, who passed the civil service examinations by memorizing and reproducing Confucian verses and historical precedents in speech and writing. These scholar-officials became surrounded by professionally technocratic officials who might not have passed the examinations but were recruited into “private secretariats” and even recommended for official appointment in the imperial court due to their expertise in administration, diplomacy, transportation, or weaponry, which were fields of specialization beyond the purview of most Confucian scholars. The highest-ranking scholar-officials served as members of the Hanlin Academy (*Hanlinyuan shi* 翰林院士), responsible for the highest levels of administration and

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<sup>2</sup> For the estimates, see Marianne Bastid, “Currents of Social Change,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 11: Late Ch’ing, 1800-1911*, Part 2, edited by John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 538. For the sale of offices, see Elizabeth Kaske, “Fund-Raising Wars: Office Selling and Interprovincial Finance in Nineteenth-Century China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 71, no. 1 (2011): 69–141; and Elizabeth Kaske, “The Price of an Office: Venality, the Individual, and the State in 19th Century China,” in *Metals, Monies, and Markets in Early Modern Societies: East Asian and Global Perspectives*, edited by Thomas Hirzel and Nanny Kim (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008), 279–304.

education in the empire. They and their protégés coalesced into a quasi-cultural force known, for the purposes of this chapter, as the “Qingliu” 清流 (Pure Stream), a loose, Beijing-based coalition of Hanlin academicians and concerned scholar-officials.

This chapter examines the career and experiences of Deng Chengxiu 鄧承修 (1841–1892), the only Qingliu member from Guangdong Province.<sup>3</sup> It provides a different interpretation of Qingliu and Yangwu by treating them as two divergent paths to higher office for aspirants who found themselves outside the geographies of power. That Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), who led the Hundred Days’ Reform 百日維新 (1898), and Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925), who inspired the Xinhai Revolution (*Xinhai geming* 辛亥革命) which overthrew the Qing, had thought of courting patrons in multiple centers of political power, is not a coincidence.

Kang Youwei secured the support of Weng Tonghe 翁同龢 (1830–1904), a Qingliu leader and the Guangxu emperor’s (r. 1875–1908) chief tutor, who recommended that Kang help the emperor implement reforms to rescue the Qing from collapse. Sun Yat-sen sought to present his ideas regarding the modernization of China to Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), who was the de facto leader of the Yangwu movement but was refused an audience.<sup>4</sup> Both Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen attempted to approach high-ranking ministers, obtain recognition for their familiarity

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to the list of suggested Qingliu members in Chen, Yongqin 陳勇勤, “Wan Qing Qingliu pai sixiang yanjiu” 晚清清流派思想研究 (A study of the Qingliu school of the late Qing), *Jindaishi yanjiu* 近代史研究 3, no. 5 (1993): 41.

<sup>4</sup> For information regarding Weng Tonghe’s role in the 1898 reforms, see Kung-chuan Hsiao 蕭公權, *Weng Tonghe yu Wuxu weixin* 翁同龢與戊戌維新 (Weng Tonghe and the Hundred Days’ Reform) (Taipei: Lianjing, 1983), 5–25. For Sun Yat-sen’s failed encounter with Li Hongzhang, see Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, translated by Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University, 1998), 39–41.

with foreign affairs, and gain access to the circuit of reform-minded officials. Because Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen were not related to the Qing's top mandarins by either birth or network, they could only "sell" their knowledge of Western ideas and institutions, which they had acquired because of Guangdong's location at the coast.

Despite the upsurge of learning in nineteenth-century Guangdong, literati from the province remained peripheral to the patron-client relationships and political networks that characterized the reform movements.<sup>5</sup> According to Marie-Claire Bergère, Li Hongzhang "was not prepared to grant his trust and patronage to products of a foreign education who could claim no social standing."<sup>6</sup> Weng Tonghe, in contrast, was willing to recruit Kang Youwei, who, despite his lack of intellectual and political pedigree, shared a classical education and could explain his reformist ideas in Confucian language.<sup>7</sup>

The historiographically significant Hundred Days' Reform and the Xinhai Revolution ultimately gave rise to Guangdong literati due to the political changes that occurred in China, while in Hunan, these events gave rise to numerous military men, reformers, and revolutionaries who were prominent figures in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Prior to these events, Deng Chengxiu managed to rise through the ranks partly due to his interest in epigraphy and seal

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<sup>5</sup> For information regarding the emergence of Guangdong – or Guangzhou – as a center of learning during the late Qing, see Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning: Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, 41.

<sup>7</sup> Hsiao, *Weng Tonghe yu Wuxu weixin*, 5–25.

carvings (*jinshi* 金石), a literary pursuit of Confucian scholar-officials, but primarily due to his fiery criticism and impeachment of corrupt, incompetent officials when he was a censor.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike his peers in the Hanlin Academy who had attained the highest *jinshi* 進士 degree in the civil service examinations, Deng Chengxiu received the *juren* 舉人 degree, which nonetheless allowed him to serve in Beijing. After the Sino-French War (*Zhong-Fa zhanzheng* 中法戰爭, 1884–1885), Deng received his most important appointment supervising a survey of Guangdong's border with Vietnam. Frustrated in his attempts to defend Qing China's interests in the Sino-French negotiations, he quit office and returned to his hometown, where he founded a school that offered both Confucian and Western lessons. Rather than regarding Deng's odyssey in political circles as an isolated case of career advancement and failure, this chapter situates this odyssey in the political culture of the late Qing era, which was characterized by factionalism and political rivalry. Deng became a fearless Confucian censor, thus circumventing the limitations geography and imperial politics set upon his career advancement.

### *Chapter Outline*

First, this chapter provides a brief overview of the alliance between empress dowagers Ci'an 慈安 (1837–1881) and Cixi 慈禧 (1835–1908) and metropolitan officials, which enabled Cixi to become late Qing China's de facto ruler and gave rise to a new political culture. Second, Deng

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<sup>8</sup> For information regarding Hunan's role as a center of late Qing and Republican-era reforms, see Stephen R. Platt, *Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Chengxiu's background, his performance as a censor, and his rise as a bureaucrat are examined.

Third, Deng Chengxiu's interest in foreign learning is related to his approach to diplomacy and surveying the Sino-Vietnamese border in Guangdong. This chapter concludes by suggesting continuities between Deng Chengxiu and subsequent political movements.

## **Late Qing Political Culture**

### *"National" Politics at a Glance*

The Qing court faced tremendous difficulties in the 1850s and 1860s. During the Taiping Rebellion and Second Opium War (1856–1860), an Anglo-French force seized Beijing in 1860 and forced the Xianfeng 咸豐 emperor (r. 1850–1861) to flee to Rehe, where he unexpectedly died in 1861. With the help of Prince Gong 恭親王 (1833–1898), who sued for peace with the British and French troops and managed Beijing in Xianfeng's absence, Ci'an and Cixi returned from Rehe and launched a coup to decapitate Sushun 肅順 (1816–1861), who was appointed by Xianfeng as regent for his child successor, the Tongzhi 同治 emperor (r. 1861–1875). Ci'an and Cixi announced their own regency with Prince Gong as *yizheng wang* 議政王 (Prince-Adviser) to assist their government on behalf of Tongzhi. The empress dowagers' rapid consolidation of power helped avert a potential crisis of imperial succession.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For information regarding the coup, see Luke S.K. Kwong, "Imperial Authority in Crisis: An Interpretation of the Coup D'état of 1861," *Modern Asian Studies* 17, no. 2 (1983): 221–238.



The vocal support of predominantly Han Chinese Hanlin academicians, who justified the empress dowagers' political role in moralistic Confucian language and even wrote a primer for their instruction, was instrumental to the formation of this female regency. These Hanlin academicians, who sat for the civil service examinations and received their official appointments by demonstrating their expert understanding of Confucian teachings in writing, sought the empress dowagers' continued patronage of classical learning in return for their loyalty.<sup>10</sup> The academicians formed patronage networks based on the examination system that were marked by vertical relationships of mentorship and horizontal relationships of marriage and scholarship.<sup>11</sup>

However, the traditional route to high offices and the maintenance of these networks were threatened by the private secretariats (*mufu* 幕府) of provincial governors who, according to the Hanlin academicians, used dynastic salvation as a pretext for actively engaging with Western institutions and technologies and maintaining large armies that could compromise central control. The private secretariats experimented with “non-Chinese” methods of modernization in reorganizing the army and developing new industries to create a fiscal-military enterprise that could strengthen and defend Qing China against foreign imperialism. These experiments strained the finances of the Qing court and decreased the attention paid to traditional learning.<sup>12</sup> More

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<sup>10</sup> Ying-kit Chan, “A Precious Mirror for Governing the Peace: A Primer for Empress Dowager Cixi,” *NAN NU: Men, Women, and Gender in China* 17, no. 2 (2015): 214–244.

<sup>11</sup> Ying-kit Chan, “Mourning During the Tongzhi Regency: The Case of Li Hongzao (1820–1897),” *Monumenta Serica* 64, no. 2 (2016): 389–410.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen R. Halsey, *Quest for Power: European Imperialism and the Making of Chinese Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

importantly, provincial governors staffed the Qing bureaucracy with non-degree-holding technical specialists from their own native provinces instead of appointees from the civil service examinations, thereby creating an alternative route to officialdom that threatened to invalidate the conventional process of selecting officials.<sup>13</sup> According to Mary Backus Rankin, “men successful in the difficult examinations still had to compete for jobs with irregular degree-holders and endure long waits for substantive appointments” – a “new normal” with which Hanlin academicians were frustrated and uncomfortable.<sup>14</sup>

The Hanlin academicians’ political anxiety was rooted in culture. The growing prominence of technocratic officials in directing the empire’s development threatened to fundamentally change the traditional scholar-officials’ desired relationship with the emperor. According to Thomas A. Metzger, the political culture of late imperial China originated from the following triangular concept of authority: the sovereign authority of the emperor (*jun* 君) was balanced by the scholarly gentleman’s (*junzi* 君子) role as the ultimate bearer of moral insight; the authority of Confucian writings surpassed both roles.<sup>15</sup> Theoretically, all legitimate authority was derived from the ruler and his mandate from heaven, and the bureaucrats relied on the ruler.<sup>16</sup> The scholar-officials,

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<sup>13</sup> The selection of officials due to their local or technical expertise might have begun earlier, perhaps on a much smaller scale, during the Yongzheng reign (1723–1735). See R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644–1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Mary Backus Rankin, “Public Opinion and Political Power: Qingyi in Late Nineteenth Century China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (1982): 455.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas A. Metzger, *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China’s Evolving Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 178–179.

<sup>16</sup> R. Kent Guy, *The Emperor’s Four Treasures: Scholars and the State in the Late Ch’ien-lung Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 205.

believing that their monarch's rule should be moral, could tap into the Confucian classics' wealth of anecdotes and principles and deploy their eloquence and rhetorical tactics to sway the ruler toward their opinion.<sup>17</sup>

The institutionalization of administrative techniques and rationalization of late Qing officialdom, which were the components of the eighteenth-century Manchu governorship system that held the provinces together, permeated bureaucratic recruitment to office and policymaking at the highest levels of late Qing officialdom.<sup>18</sup> Specialists in diplomatic, financial, and military matters, most of whom had not passed the "moral" civil service examinations, began a non-official career in the private secretariats. By their superiors' recommendation (*baoju* 保舉), they became officials staffing the chief organs of government.<sup>19</sup> For the Hanlin academicians and other scholar-officials, the shift in focus from moral leadership to technocratic leadership imperiled not only their relevance to state affairs but also the morality of the ruler and the ruled.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas C. Lee, "Academies, Official Scholarship, and Suppression," in *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, edited by Frederick P. Brandauer and Chun-chieh Huang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 136–137. For information regarding the strategies and terms used by late imperial Chinese bureaucrats to make their arguments, see Thomas A. Metzger, *The Inner Organization of Ch'ing Bureaucracy: Legal, Normative, and Communication Aspects* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 109–129.

<sup>18</sup> For information regarding the system of Qing governorship, see Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces*.

<sup>19</sup> Yang Guoqiang 楊國強, *Shuaishi yu Xifa: Wan Qing Zhongguo de jiubang xinming he shehui tuosun* 衰世與西法: 晚清中國的舊邦新命和社會脫樑 (Decline and Western Ways: New Missions and Social Dislocations in late Qing China) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2016), 258–317. Technical experts who wielded significant power in late Qing politics included Li Hongzhang and his chief economic assistant Sheng Xuanhuai 盛宣懷 (1844–1916). See Albert Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization: Sheng Hsuan-huai (1844–1916) and Mandarin Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958); and Yen-p'ing Hao. *The Comprador in Nineteenth Century China: Bridge between East and West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

<sup>20</sup> Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning, 1890–1911* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987). Late Qing China was increasingly a technical meritocracy rather than a moral meritocracy. For information regarding the changes in the "meritocratic regime," see Benjamin A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

In response, traditional or “regular path” scholar-officials revived the tradition of literati activism, which characterized the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and the Jiaqing 嘉慶 reign (1796–1820) of the Qing dynasty. During the late Ming, the Donglin 東林 scholars, who were named after the academy in which they were trained to translate Confucian moral philosophy into political activism, resisted the domination of eunuch strongman Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568–1627) by successfully placement in the Hanlin Academy via the civil service examinations. After nearly a century of suppression of literati activism by earlier Qing rulers, who attributed the fall of the Ming dynasty to unrestrained literati factionalism, the Spring Purification Circle (*Zhanchunji* 湛春集), a quasi-literary association comprising both high-ranking officials and non-degree-holding literati, emerged in the 1820s and openly admired Donglin scholars’ moral opposition and political aspirations. Similar societies, such as the Xuannan Poetry Club (*Xuannan shishe* 宣南詩社), began to emerge when Qing emperors, including Jiaqing and Daoguang 道光 (r. 1820–1850), sought to broaden political participation to identify administrative malfeasance, bureaucratic misrule, and political networks, including those formed by Heshen 和珅 (1750–1799) and Mujangga 穆彰阿 (1782–1856).<sup>21</sup> Inspired by such precedents, late Qing scholar-officials organized frequent gatherings to discuss calligraphy, poetry, epigraphy, and seal carvings, amongst other literary

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<sup>21</sup> For information regarding the deep historical continuities between the Donglin movement and the Qing literary associations, see Benjamin A. Elman, “Imperial Politics and Confucian Societies in Late Imperial China: The Hanlin and Donglin Academies,” *Modern China* 15, no. 4 (1989): 379–418. For information regarding the nature of Qing literary associations, see James M. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge, MA: The Council on Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992). For information regarding the Qing emperors’ view of the literati’s activism and protests, see Seunghyun Han, *After the Prosperous Age: State and Elites in Early Nineteenth-Century Suzhou* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016).

pursuits, in order to network with high-ranking colleagues who shared their interests, and distinguish themselves from the Yangwu technocrats, who purportedly did not possess the cultural attainment necessary to artisanal connoisseurship.

### *The Rise of “Qingliu” Politics*

According to Lloyd E. Eastman and Mary Backus Rankin, many of these scholar-officials formed a clique known as “Qingliu” 清流 (“Pure Stream”), which proposed revisiting the Confucian classics and history for inspiration to resolve national crises instead of referring to Western learning. Similar to the literary associations of the late Ming and mid-Qing, they emphasized statecraft learning and political participation by morally upright Confucian literati, who might not have degrees or titles. They deplored the Yangwu officials by calling them the “Impure Stream” (*zhuoliu* 濁流), questioning their moral character on the basis that they had corrupted Chinese culture and Qing institutions.<sup>22</sup>

The conflicts between the Qingliu scholar-officials and Yangwu technocrats allowed the empress dowagers to readopt the “divide-and-rule” strategy of previous Qing emperors and play one bureaucratic faction against the other to maintain their arbitrary and bureaucratic powers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lloyd E. Eastman, “Ch’ing-i and Chinese Policy Formation during the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 24, no. 4 (1965): 596–611; and Mary Backus Rankin, “Public Opinion and Political Power: Qingyi in Late Nineteenth Century China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (1982): 453–484.

<sup>23</sup> Polachek, *The Inner Opium War*. On the interplay between the arbitrary and bureaucratic powers of Qing emperors, see Beatrice S. Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch’ing China, 1723–1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

Eastman suggests that during the empress dowagers' regency (1861–1908), three centers of power dominated imperial policy: Cixi (the throne); Li Hongzhang and his technocratic aides, who derived their power from their administrative functions; and the Qingliu group, which professed to uphold Confucian morality and the ideological legitimation of imperial power.<sup>24</sup> To these centers of power, the Manchu aristocracy of the extra-bureaucratic Grand Council (*Junjichu* 軍機處), which augmented the Qing emperor's arbitrary powers, should be added.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, categorizing late Qing officials as either “Qingliu” or “Yangwu” simplifies too much. The notion of the Son of Heaven became incompatible with increasing knowledge of natural laws and Western science, challenging the legitimacy of Confucian cosmological kingship, at least in the Chinese provinces of the Manchu empire. Chinese literati, classically educated and otherwise, had to reconfigure their worldview according to both prior knowledge and the new concepts of the cosmos and social world.<sup>26</sup> Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909), who passed the highest metropolitan examinations and became a high-ranking scholar-official, particularly defied labels. He emphasized Confucian teachings but was as enthusiastic as Li Hongzhang about building arsenals, banks, and railroads and modernizing the military, navy, and schools in the provinces under his jurisdiction.<sup>27</sup> He justified the “traditional” imperial order against radical reformism by appealing to

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<sup>24</sup> Lloyd E. Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy during the Sino-French Controversy, 1880–1885* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 3–4.

<sup>25</sup> Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers*.

<sup>26</sup> Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis*.

<sup>27</sup> William Ayers, *Chang Chih-tung and Educational Reform in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1971).

“secular” images of a conscientious Qing monarch rather than invoking the mystique of the cosmological kingship.<sup>28</sup> Even Li Hongzhang, who supposedly led the Yangwu movement, came from a literati background. As previously mentioned, he was reluctant to patronize anyone who had not received classical training.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the Qingliu-Yangwu division obscured several of the more intimate relationships between individual officials despite their differences. Li Hongzhang and non-Yangwu scholar-officials Li Hongzao 李鴻藻 (1820–1897) and Zhang Peilun 張佩綸 (1848–1903) wrote letters inquiring about each other’s health and matters of government. In 1882, Li Hongzao even convinced Cixi to relieve Li Hongzhang of his mourning obligations for his mother so that he would remain in service and not return to his hometown.<sup>30</sup>

Wang Weijiang thus breaks new ground when he suggests that the “Qingliu” was neither a clique nor a faction. Unlike historians such as Lloyd E. Eastman and Mary Backus Rankin, he rejects the use of “Qingliu” as a category to describe late Qing scholar-officials. For Wang, the “Qingliu” faction did not exist. Rather, it is, at best, an extremely broad and vague term used at the time to refer to the censors and Hanlin academicians who remonstrated with the emperor. At worst, it is a historiographical construct adopted by late Qing political enemies, Republican-era scholars, and modern historians, often with negative connotations, in order to claim that culturally and

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<sup>28</sup> Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> The letters are collected at the Shanghai Library. See Jiang Ming 姜鳴, “Li Hongzhang ‘duoqing’ fuchu yu ‘qingliu’ de muhou chouhua: Zhang Peilun Li Hongzhang tongxin yanjiu” 李鴻章 “奪情” 復出與 “清流” 的幕後籌劃: 張佩綸李鴻章通信研究 (Li Hongzhang’s return from mourning and the behind-the-scene planning of the “Qingliu”). *Huadong shifan daxue xuebao* 華東師範大學學報 44, no. 3 (2010): 14–22.

politically conservative officials impeded the development of Chinese modernity. While Eastman, Rankin, and other historians suggest that the “Qingliu” was an amorphous faction with a somewhat coherent ideology and obvious leadership, Wang argues through his case studies of officials commonly identified as “Qingliu” that they were not necessarily anti-foreign and that their literary circle was a fashionable outlet for career preferment rather than a political statement motivated by self-aggrandization and differentiation.<sup>31</sup>

One of Wang’s case studies is Deng Chengxiu who, despite his best efforts as described by Wang, found himself outside the prominent literary societies and hence beneath the highest-ranking Beijing scholar-officials’ notice. As Deng Chengxiu struggled to forge his own political network and carve a niche for himself as a fearlessly straight-talking censor, he became a character who cannot be easily pigeonholed as belonging to the “Qingliu” faction. He developed an early interest in foreign—specifically Japanese—learning and did not oppose modernization efforts modeled upon Western concepts.<sup>32</sup> One thing that distinguished the “Qingliu” and the *qingyi* 清議 (pure or disinterested discussion) that it represented from the literati activisms of the late Ming and mid-Qing periods was the preoccupation of both scholar-officials and Yangwu advocates with making sense of the West and deciding whether the Qing state should adopt Western ideas and institutions

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<sup>31</sup> Wang Weijiang 王維江, “*Qingliu*” *yanjiu* “清流” 研究 (A study of “Qingliu”) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2009). Historians have also identified a north-south divide in the Qingliu faction based on the birthplaces of its members (Lin 2005). According to Wang Weijiang, however, such a divide sustained the myth of Qingliu as an easily discernable group, this time along the lines of geography and native place. See Wang 2009, 8–9. Eastman states that the “Qingliu” “Party” was not “a ‘tightly-knit, intimate group’” (Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins*, 28); Wang disputes Eastman mainly on the latter’s categorization of some seven officials as a core Qingliu group, which is indeed contradictory.

<sup>32</sup> Wang, *Qingliu yanjiu*, 251–277.



for development.<sup>33</sup> Although Wang has problematized the concept of “Qingliu,” it remains helpful for reconceptualizing the career paths that Deng Chengxiu walked or could have taken. Whether Deng was a “Qingliu” member lies beyond this chapter’s concerns.

## Deng Chengxiu and His Connections

### *Deng Chengxiu in Beijing*

Deng Chengxiu was born in the small town of Danshui 淡水, Guishan 歸善 District, Guangdong Province. In 1861, he passed the provincial examinations and attained the *juren* title. At the outset, he was more a careerist than a moralist. In 1863, given the intense competition for official titles and appointments, he decided not to sit for further examinations and instead purchased office to accelerate his career. He became a Department Director (*langzhong* 郎中) at the Board of Punishments (*xingbu* 刑部). Subsequently, he served as an investigating censor (*jiancha yushi* 監察御史) in Sichuan, Yunnan, and Zhejiang.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout his career, Deng Chengxiu maintained a residence in Beijing. He received information from visiting officials regarding the provinces’ conditions under his purview and was irregularly dispatched to the provinces, which allowed him to lodge in Beijing and befriend the natives and acquaintances who traveled to Beijing to complete the metropolitan examinations. One of his friends, Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 (1839–1915), who would become a famous historical

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<sup>33</sup> Wang, *Qingliu yanjiu*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Deng Chengxiu 鄧承修. *Yubingge zouyi* 語冰閣奏議 (Memorials from the Yubing Pavilion) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1967), 1–2.

geographer and connoisseur of stele writings, stayed at his residence and became a lifelong friend.

According to Yang, Deng was fond of seal carvings and visited the market daily to purchase them.

Deng kept the exquisite seals and offered the less delicate seals to Yang. Deng also covered Yang's expenses in Beijing.

However, Deng was not exceptionally wealthy. As a fifth-rank official, Deng did not receive a salary that would allow him to completely indulge in epigraphical connoisseurship. He was nonetheless sufficiently wealthy not to begin his career as a staff member of the private secretariats as some of his impecunious contemporaries had. Having failed the metropolitan examinations, and not wanting to teach at private clan schools (*sidian* 私塾) that paid little, some poor scholars entered the private secretariats while preparing to take the examinations again.<sup>35</sup> Deng was able to avoid such a fate. His uncle, who had presumably paid for his office, financially supported him in Beijing, which was an expensive city to live in at that time.<sup>36</sup>

### *Cultural Pursuits*

By purchasing office rather than passing the metropolitan examinations to attain the ultimate *jinshi* title, Deng Chengxiu hoped to accelerate his career. His official appointments and rank did not demand regular attendance in the imperial court. His choice to reside in Beijing was thus deliberate

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<sup>35</sup> Shang Xiaoming 尚小明, *Xueren youmu yu Qingdai xueshu* 學人游幕與清代學術 (Officials' private secretaries and Qing-dynasty scholarship) (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2018), 76-78.

<sup>36</sup> Yang Shoujing 楊守敬, *Lin Su laoren nianpu* 林蘇老人年譜 (The Chronological Biography of Yang Shoujing) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1972), 13. For a glimpse of bureaucratic life in Beijing, see Zhang 1970. For the nature of the Qing censor's work, see *Qinding taigui* 欽定臺規 (Imperially commissioned rules of the censorate), in *Gugong zhenben congkan* 故宮珍本叢刊 (A compilation of rare texts from the palace) (Haikou: Hainan, 2001), 4.

in the hope of forging ties with high-ranking ministers and metropolitan officials. Epigraphical appreciation and the study of seal and stele rubbings served as avenues for him. Many metropolitan officials who dominated Beijing's political scene were enthusiasts of epigraphy and had supported the careers of their peers and protégés who shared their cultural interests. Pan Zuyin 潘祖蔭 (1830–1890), Weng Tonghe, and Zhang Zhidong, who were widely recognized as leaders of epigraphical research, composed essays, letters, and poems to one another and other metropolitan officials citing the inscriptions of prized seals and steles. Their subordinates and the younger members of their political-cum-scholarly circles were also expected to perform these activities; the failure to reciprocate could have social and political consequences, and be grounds for disqualification from the imagined community of “Qingliu.”

The pastimes of metropolitan officials also included the study of editions (*banbenxue* 版本學), bronze objects, ceramics, jade, painting, calligraphy, herbalism, and physiognomy, but the study of epigraphy and ancient inscriptions was most important because it reflected the deepest respect for tradition.<sup>37</sup> The connoisseur-officials also took it upon themselves to restore the glorious art and culture of southeastern China, where academies, books, and precious artifacts had been destroyed during the Taiping Rebellion.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> For information regarding the role of epigraphy in Qingliu scholarly circles, see Liu Shiyi 劉士義, “Zhang Zhidong sanwen yanjiu” 張之洞散文研究 (The study of essays by Zhang Zhidong) (MA diss., Lanzhou University, 2010); and Lu Chuan 盧川, “Shen Zengzhi shige yanjiu” 沈曾植詩歌研究 (The study of Shen Zengzhi's poems) (PhD diss.: Shandong University, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> Lu Yin 陸胤, *Zhengjiao cunxu yu wenjiao zhuanxing: jindai xueshushi shang de Zhang Zhidong xueren quan* 政教存續與文教轉型：近代學術史上的張之洞學人圈 (The continuation of statecraft learning and the

Despite his “investments,” Deng Chengxiu did not become a specialist in epigraphy. His friends in Beijing pursued artisanal learning to greater success. They included fellow Guangdong natives Chen Qiaosen 陳喬森 (1833–1905) and Pan Cun 潘存 (1817–1893), both of whom became paleographers and were invited to the “elegant gatherings” (*yaji* 雅集) organized by Pan Zuyin, Weng Tonghe, and Zhang Zhidong; Deng’s name was missing from their list.<sup>39</sup> Pan Cun was a secretary (*zhushi* 主事) at the Board of Revenue (*hubu* 戶部) for 30 years. Chen Qiaosen came from poverty and borrowed from Deng and Pan to purchase office, becoming a secretary at the Board of Revenue. Although Chen Qiaosen, Pan Cun, and Yang Shoujing became famous scholars, they were not selected for higher office and did not serve in the Grand Council and Hanlin Academy, which were the most powerful institutions of the Qing government. The competition for literary fame and political positions was fierce even for second-generation ministers and their protégés.<sup>40</sup> Deng Chengxiu failed to assimilate into the top cultural and hence political circles of Beijing and had to find another way to advance his career. His appointment as a censor provided an avenue to pursue a successful bureaucratic career without compromising his moral convictions as a Confucian scholar.

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transformation of Confucian teachings: The scholarly circle of Zhang Zhidong in modern intellectual history) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015), 41–42.

<sup>39</sup> Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, *Zhang Zhidong quanji* 張之洞全集 (The Complete Writings of Zhang Zhidong) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1998), 10100–10102.

<sup>40</sup> Wang, *Qingliu yanjiu*, 258–259.

### *A Brief History of Imperial “Censorship”*

According to the Confucian ideal, wise rulers act upon the remonstrance of the morally superior bureaucrats whom they have inspired to serve. In reality, not all bureaucrats were impartial, incorruptible, and immune to the organized pressure stemming from their relationships with friends and kinsmen.<sup>41</sup> Recognizing the disconnect between the ideal and reality, rulers from the Qin (221–205 BCE) to the Qing dynasties deployed censors to identify incompetent or malfeasant officials at the capital, provincial, and county levels and impeach them. As purportedly more objective observers of imperial policymaking, censors were also required to be fearlessly candid in cautioning the ruler and report his inadequacies.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, the Censorial Bureau (*Yushitai* 御史臺) prior to the Qing existed outside the imperial bureaucratic structure, serving as an advisory board to the emperor. During the reigns of Yongzheng 雍正 (r. 1723–1735) and Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1735–1796), who attributed the fall of the Ming to literati partisanship and found it difficult to ascertain whether censorial reports were devoid of factional interests, censorial opinions critical of the emperor were dismissed. The Qing emperors portrayed themselves as guardians of Confucian morality standing against opportunistic literati who formed bickering cliques that did more harm than good and incorporated the Censorial Bureau into the Censorate (*Duchayuan* 督察院) which became a part of the bureaucracy. Rather than advising

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<sup>41</sup> Ch'ing-kun Yang, “Some Characteristics of Chinese Bureaucratic Behavior,” in *Confucianism in Action*, edited by David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright (Stanford: Stanford University, 1959), 134–164.

<sup>42</sup> Charles O. Hucker, “Confucianism and the Chinese Censorial System,” in *Confucianism in Action*, edited by David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright (Stanford: Stanford University, 1959), 182–208.

the ruler and correcting his mistakes, the censors were required to report the failings of fellow bureaucrats, including those in the Grand Council and Hanlin Academy. The professional scope of a Qing censor involved recommending appointments and policies, impeaching bureaucrats, and returning edicts for corrections if mistakes were detected.

Ultimately, the censors had little control over the emperor's actions because their advisory role was taken over by the Grand Council and Hanlin Academy. Qing emperors preferred the direct, secretive palace memorial system in which correspondence regarding confidential matters remained strictly between them and the memorialists, transmitted via the memorialists' confidants. By Qing times, the Censorate had lost its capacity to advise the emperor and check imperial power, becoming an institution devoted to reporting bureaucratic shortcomings for the ruler's reference.<sup>43</sup>

The Qing emperors sought to exercise their power through inner-court institutions, namely the Grand Council and the Imperial Household Department (*Neiwufu* 內務府), which circumvented the Han Chinese-dominated outer-court bureaucracy of the Censorate, Hanlin Academy, and the six boards and nine ministries. The Qianlong emperor had been singled out by Chinese scholars for wielding immense personalized, arbitrary power at the expense of his bureaucrats.<sup>44</sup> Cixi, despite

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<sup>43</sup> For information regarding the evolution of the Qing censorial system, see Lin Qian 林乾 and Ju Hua 句華, *Yanguan yu Kang Qian zhengzhi* 言官與康乾政治 (Speech officials and politics from the Kangxi to Qianlong reigns) (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 2013); and Zeng Guangguang 曾光光, *Tongcheng pai yu Qingdai xueshu liubian* 桐城派與清代學術流變 (The Tongcheng School and changes in Qing scholarship) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2016), 42–60. Despite their low rank, Qing censors could direct secret memorials to the emperor. See Silas H.L. Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China: Evolution of the Palace Memorial System, 1693–1735* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 23–24.

<sup>44</sup> Wensheng Wang, *White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates: Crisis and Reform in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 113–131; Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

her modest background as a concubine and the bureaucratic constraints on empress dowagers' power, sought to assume the imperial prerogatives maintained by the early Qing emperors.<sup>45</sup> A key component of the bureaucracy, the Censorate served not only as the moral conscience of the empire but also as a source of rhetorical support for the empress dowagers' regency.

Shortly after the death of Xianfeng, censor Dong Yuanchun 董元醇 (*jinsi* 1852) petitioned the throne to honor the empress dowagers as custodians of imperial power. His memorial justified the removal of Sushun from power.<sup>46</sup> In 1875, the Tongzhi emperor died. Cixi secretly instructed Pan Zuyin and Weng Tonghe to recommend the proclamation of Guangxu as the new emperor so that she could approve their proposal. Pan and Weng mobilized censors and subordinate officials to create a strong bureaucratic opinion that “forced” the empress dowagers to select the four-year-old Guangxu for the throne and remain “behind the curtains” in assisting his rule.<sup>47</sup>

### *Walking a New Path*

Deng Chengxiu was not involved in the force maintaining the empress dowagers' dominant position in late Qing politics. Nevertheless, beginning in the 1870s, as Cixi widened the “avenue of remonstrance” (*yanlu* 言路) to curb the growing power of provincial governors and elicit support

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<sup>45</sup> For information regarding how Cixi maintained her control of the late Qing court, see Li Yuhang and Harriet T. Zurndorfer, “Rethinking Empress Dowager Cixi through the Production of Art,” *NAN NU: Men, Women, and Gender in China* 14, no. 1 (2012): 1-20.

<sup>46</sup> *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan* 中國第一歷史檔案館, ed., *Xianfeng chao shangyu dang* 咸豐朝上諭檔, Vol. 11 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2008), 306.

<sup>47</sup> However, several censors had criticized what they considered Cixi's usurpation of power by placing Guangxu on the throne and remaining in power. See Marianne Bastid, “Official Conceptions of Imperial Authority at the End of the Qing Dynasty,” in *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China*, edited by Stuart R. Schram (London: University of London, SOAS, and Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1987), 147–185.

for her role as regent, Deng Chengxiu had a moment to seize. Censors were freed, at least in name, from the institutional restraints of earlier reigns, becoming more actively involved in imperial succession and national politics. By cloaking Cixi's regency in moralistic language that transcended both ethnicity and gender, many censors became Cixi's implicit allies in her consolidation of power.<sup>48</sup> In speaking out against impropriety and challenges to imperial authority, they defended imperial prestige and did not shy away from criticizing higher-ranked bureaucrats on moral or traditional grounds. The widened *yanlu* offered censors and low-ranking scholar-officials, such as Deng Chengxiu who had no obvious access to any political network, an opportunity to make an impression by impeaching officials with courage (because Li Hongzhang and the governors-general were powerful) and eloquence (because the scholar-officials valued literary flair, even when writing petitions and complaints).<sup>49</sup>

However, censorial opinion had its limits, particularly if it contradicted the intentions of the emperor and the empress dowagers. The Tongzhi emperor ignored censors who cautioned him against restoring the Old Summer Palace (Yuanmingyuan 圓明園) amid the rise of widespread bureaucratic corruption and fiscal difficulties. He argued that the restoration was as much an act of filial piety – part of the restored premises would serve as the empress dowagers' living and leisure quarters – as a symbol of imperial resurgence; the joint pressure of the empress dowagers and

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<sup>48</sup> Edward J.M. Rhoads, *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000; Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>49</sup> For information regarding the Chinese constitutional agenda, see Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).



Prince Gong was required for him to relent his stance.<sup>50</sup> During the Guangxu reign, censors who warned of the growing power of Cixi's favorite eunuch Li Lianying 李蓮英 (1848–1911) were cashiered. Those who advised Cixi to reduce expenditure on palace reconstruction were chided or demoted.<sup>51</sup> For Cixi, censorial opinion was important only from her perspective and mobilized only when she required vocal bureaucratic support for her intentions. Censors who supported Cixi's decisions could also expect to receive promotions, and the main criterion for appointments to high-ranking official positions was Cixi's confidence in individuals whom she considered her political ally, faithful aide-de-camp, or someone who could hold her respect.<sup>52</sup>

Even Li Hongzhang understood that the censors and Hanlin academicians who sought to impeach him were trying to anticipate Cixi's wish of curbing his power and did not dare react strongly to them.<sup>53</sup> For Deng Chengxiu's part, he took a gamble with his vocal role as a censor. It was generally known that Li Hongzhang was Cixi's proxy in spearheading the Yangwu movement and conducting diplomatic relations with foreigners; the Zongli Yamen was restricted to managing affairs related to foreigners inside China.<sup>54</sup> Deng had to determine how much he could criticize

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<sup>50</sup> Young-tsu Wong, *A Paradise Lost: The Imperial Garden Yuanming Yuan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2001); Emily Mokros, "Reconstructing the Imperial Retreat: Politics, Communications, and the Yuanming Yuan under the Tongzhi Emperor, 1873–4," *Late Imperial China* 33, no. 2 (2012): 76–118.

<sup>51</sup> Yang Guoqiang 楊國強, *Wan Qing de shiren yu shixiang* 晚清的士人與世相 (Scholars and their world during the late Qing) (Beijing: Sanlian, 2017), 158–159.

<sup>52</sup> Wook Yoon, "The Grand Council and the Communication Systems in the Late Qing" (Ph.D. diss. Yale University, 2008), 30–31.

<sup>53</sup> Wang, *Qingliu yanjiu*, 24–25.

<sup>54</sup> Kwang-Ching Liu, "Li Hung-chang in Chihli: The Emergence of a Policy, 1870–1875," in *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization*, edited by Samuel C. Chu and Kwang-Ching Liu, 49–75 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 49–75.

Yangwu officials to impress fellow scholar-officials without offending Cixi's sensibilities or her out-of-bounds markers.

Deng Chengxiu made a distinction between court officials, whom he called *guanli* 官吏, from frontier officials (*jiangli* 疆吏), most of whom were Yangwu officials. In a memorial urging the impeachment of Shanxi lieutenant governor Fang Dashi 方大澍 (active between 1855 and 1880), Deng wrote that unlike court officials who were disciplined and strict, frontier officials, such as Fang, were contemptuous of imperial laws and acted more arrogantly than ever (*wan fa ren qing, jiaojian ru gu* 玩法任情, 驕蹇如故).<sup>55</sup> The high-ranking officials Deng sought to impeach included Sichuan governor Ding Baozhen 丁寶楨 (1820–1886), Li Hongzhang's elder brother Li Hanzhang 李瀚章 (1821–1899), Yangwu leader Wang Wenshao 王文韶 (1830–1908), and Yunnan governor Zhang Kaisong 張凱嵩 (1820–1886), most of whom were either Li Hongzhang's protégés, former staff, or frontier officials loyal to him.

The following statement from one of Deng's memorials captures his complaint against the Yangwu advocates:

方今時事艱難, 外患孔函, 辦理之要, 首在內治, 所謂內治者, 正朝廷以清其源也。

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<sup>55</sup> Zhu Shoupeng 朱壽朋, *Guangxu chao donghua lu* 光緒朝東華錄 (Records of the Guangxu reign), Vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958 [1909]), 1491–1492.

We are living in challenging times, facing threats from abroad. The way to manage our difficulties is first and foremost domestic governance. Domestic governance refers to the process in which the court purifies the sources of its rule.<sup>56</sup>

In a memorial to impeach Wang Wenshao, Deng wrote,

方今人才雜揉, 吏事滋蠹, 紀綱墮壞, 賄賂公行, 天變於上, 人怨於下, 挽回之術, 惟在任人.

A mix of characters are serving the court, [causing] bureaucratic incompetence, breakdown of discipline, and corruption. Heaven changes, and the people are frustrated. The way to remedy this lies only in appointing [the right] people [for governance].<sup>57</sup>

Deng implied that the court should recruit moral exemplars and wise scholar-officials and dispatch these individuals to frontier duties. He proposed that the court punish corrupt and self-serving frontier officials in the following statement: “if bureaucratic discipline is not upheld, the state is non-existent” (*jigang bu zhang, he yi wei guo* 綱紀不張, 何以為國).<sup>58</sup> That said, Deng Chengxiu did not attack the Yangwu movement per se. Although most of the officials under his fire were Yangwu officials, he criticized them on Confucian, moral principles. For him, dealing with Western

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<sup>56</sup> Deng, *Yubingge zouyi*, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Deng, *Yubingge zouyi*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Zhu, *Guangxu chao donghua lu*, Vol. 2, 1017.

affairs could contaminate minds. An official uneducated in the classics in any way was even more susceptible to practicing corruption and flouting the law under foreign influence.

By proposing to impeach Li Hongzhang and officials holding ranks above his own, Deng finally received the attention of high-ranking scholar-officials. In 1882, Deng was promoted to imperial censor (*geishizhong* 給事中). By then, Deng had become known as the “iron censor” (*tiemian yushi* 鐵面御史).<sup>59</sup> He was now able to meet Cixi and Guangxu to propose the impeachment of any official whom he considered unfit for office.<sup>60</sup> This implies that Li Hongzao, Pan Zuyin, and Weng Tonghe felt comfortable to offer Deng a direct channel through which to submit memorials.

In 1883, when Deng proposed to impeach Zuo Zongtang 左宗棠 (1812–1885), who held a *juren* degree but became a Grand Councilor and Hanlin academician, for mishandling matters in Xinjiang as well as relations with Russia, Weng Tonghe justified Deng’s strongly worded and potentially offensive memorial on the grounds that he was learning on the job.<sup>61</sup> According to Guangdong literatus Shen Zongji 沈宗畸 (1857–1926), Deng had joined the ranks of Qingliu members due to his ardent suggestions.<sup>62</sup> Deng became a fourth-rank grand minister (*zongli*

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<sup>59</sup> Yang Shoujing 楊守敬, *Yang Shoujing ji* 楊守敬集 (Collected Writings of Yang Shoujing), Vol. 8 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1988), 1142.

<sup>60</sup> Sun Wenliang 孫文良, *Zhongguo guan zhi shi* 中國官制史 (The history of the Chinese bureaucratic system) (Taipei: Wenjin, 1993), 338.

<sup>61</sup> Weng Tonghe 翁同龢, *Weng Tonghe riji* 翁同龢日記 (The diaries of Weng Tonghe), Vol. 4 (Taipei: Chengwen, 1970), 1757.

<sup>62</sup> Shen Zongji 沈宗畸, “Bianjiayi zachao” 便佳稊雜鈔 (Random jottings from Bianjia hut), in *Jindai baihai* 近代稗海, Vol. 13 (Tales of minor officials in modern history), edited by Gu Ya 顧亞 and Zhang Bofeng 章伯鋒 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin, 1989), 503–504.

*dachen* 總理大臣), and Liang Dingfen 梁鼎芬 (1859–1919), his close friend, congratulated his meteoric rise from the lowest of bureaucratic ranks to a top ministerial position.

### *The Sino-French War Broke Out*

As Deng Chengxiu became prominent as a censor, the Sino-French War (1884–1885) broke out. Cixi initially resolved to fight the French in Vietnam, ordering Li Hongzhang to go to Guangdong and prepare its defenses. Li Hongzhang refused to head to the frontline, reasoning that his presence would alarm the French and provoke preemptive attack on Chinese territory from Vietnam. He also argued that he had to guard against the Japanese who might capitalize on the war to invade China from the seas.<sup>63</sup> Without Li Hongzhang's support, Cixi grew pessimistic about the outcome, especially after failing to secure an alliance with Britain or Germany; she was also wary of Japanese and Russian designs on China as the war progressed. She soon lost much of her confidence in the censors and Hanlin academicians who vouched for Zhang Peilun, who himself had advocated war but helped bring about the destruction of the Fuzhou Naval Yard by the French when it was placed under his charge—a major fiasco for the Qing. Disappointed, Cixi viewed the war's supporters, almost all of whom were non-Yangwu scholar-officials, as armchair strategists engaging in empty talk.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Li Zhiming 李志茗, *Muliao yu shibian: Zhao Fengchang cangzha zhengli yanjiu chubian* 幕僚與世變:《趙鳳昌藏札》整理研究初編 (Private secretariats and worldly changes: a preliminary study of Zhao Fengchang's private writings) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2017), 86-87.

<sup>64</sup> Wang, *Qingliu yanjiu*, 113-115.

To Cixi, these officials impeded the peace settlement that she wanted to initiate for the Qing, and so she moved to suppress them. In early 1885, she began to demote, punish, and transfer outspoken memorialists on the grounds that they were making unfounded, slanderous statements motivated by factional rivalries. She also took the opportunity to remove Prince Gong from power and purge the Grand Council, staffing it instead with men who she thought could continue the war with skill and perhaps sue for peace with even greater skill.<sup>65</sup> When Deng Chengxiu protested against Cixi's treatment of memorialists, he was demoted. According to Lloyd E. Eastman, Cixi's specious standard of "proper" policy criticisms cowed scholar-officials and grounded their resistance. When the Treaty of Tientsin that ended the war was signed later in 1885, opposition was unvoiced. Cixi had opted for reconciliation with the French. Acting like a relentless Confucian-style remonstrator had become unfashionable and politically suicidal.<sup>66</sup>

## **Surveying the Sino-Vietnamese Border**

### *A New Beginning*

Despite Deng Chengxiu's demotion, his career was far from over. After expressing her displeasure with bellicose officials and concluding the armistice in 1885, Cixi commissioned Deng to survey Guangdong's border with Vietnam, which had become a French protectorate. Wang Weijiang suggested that Deng's appointment resulted from the following mix of factors: Cixi had

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<sup>65</sup> Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins*, 148.

<sup>66</sup> Eastman, "Ch'ing-i and Chinese Policy Formation during the Nineteenth Century," 607–609.

cashiered Prince Gong due to his purportedly indecisive leadership during the war; Prince Chun 醇親王 (1840–1891), who took over the management of foreign affairs and peace negotiations with the French from Prince Gong, was on cordial terms with Deng; Cixi did not trust most of the scholar-officials, whom she thought would be unyielding in their dealings with the French, or the Yangwu officials, who might compromise Qing interests in their eagerness to broker a peace settlement with the French. Deng appeared more interested in diplomacy and foreign affairs than most scholar-officials. Perhaps more importantly, Cixi had always held Deng in high regard.<sup>67</sup> For Cixi, Deng was serious about his work and had abilities and talents.<sup>68</sup>

Li Ciming 李慈銘 (1830–1895), who was one of Deng Chengxiu's first friends in Beijing, recalled Deng's interest in Japan and fascination with Japanese coins and knives. According to Li, Deng read the Chinese translation of *Nihon Gaishi* 日本外史 (Unofficial history of Japan), which was given to him by He Ruzhang 何如璋 (1838–1891), China's first minister to Japan.<sup>69</sup> Educated men could acquaint themselves quickly with Western knowledge by learning about Japan, which shows again that Deng was not staunchly anti-foreign or anti-Yangwu. Yang Shoujing had also served as a diplomat in Japan, so Deng likely enjoyed multiple sources of information regarding Japan.

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<sup>67</sup> Wang, *Qingliu yanjiu*, 267.

<sup>68</sup> Deng Chengxiu 鄧承修, "Deng Chengxiu kanjie riji" 鄧承修勘界日記 (Deng Chengxiu's diary of surveying the border), in *Deng Chengxiu kanjie ziliao huibian* 鄧承修勘界資料匯編 (Collection of materials on Deng Chengxiu's surveying of the border), edited by Xiao Dehao 蕭德浩 and Wu Guoqiang 吳國強 (Guilin: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1990), 115–116.

<sup>69</sup> Jin Liang 金梁, *Jinshi renwu zhi* 近世人物志 (Biographies of recent dignitaries) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1979), 194.

Yang was also a famed geographer who read antiquarian books no longer in circulation in China as well as translated copies of Western scientific works. Deng had most likely acquired some knowledge regarding cartography from Yang, even though the evidence for this is circumstantial.<sup>70</sup> According to Wang Weijiang, many scholar-officials in Beijing, most notably Weng Tonghe, cultivated the habit of reading *Shenbao* 申報 (Shanghai News), from which they derived a basic understanding of foreign affairs, and Deng could have been one of them.<sup>71</sup>

Deng Chengxiu demonstrated his knowledge of French and regional geopolitics in his advocacy for effective Qing resistance. He proposed strengthening Qing fortifications in Shandong Province to discourage the Japanese from intervening on the side of France. When the French attempted to sue for peace later during the war, Deng noted, rather accurately in retrospect, that they faced problems such as domestic opposition and a logistical overstretch. He thus recommended that the court refuse negotiations and continue the war. More importantly, as a native of Guangdong, Deng was deeply concerned about the province's strategic vulnerability during the war in his memorials. He worried that the French would use Vietnam as a base from which to invade and annex Guangdong and Yunnan provinces.<sup>72</sup> Cixi might have considered Deng a possibly strong defender of Qing interests in defining the Guangdong-Vietnam border.

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<sup>70</sup> Wang, *Qingliu yanjiu*, 263–264.

<sup>71</sup> Wang, *Qingliu yanjiu*, 180–181.

<sup>72</sup> Wu Guoqiang 吳國強, “Deng Chengxiu lun” 鄧承修論 (A discussion of Deng Chengxiu), *Guangdong shizhi* 廣東史志, no. 1 (1999): 37–40.



For Deng Chengxiu, the Treaty of Tientsin already recognized the French protectorate over Vietnam; by surveying the Guangdong border, he aimed to forestall French encroachment upon the province. By Deng's assessment, the region along the Guangxi-Tonkin border had infertile land and was scarcely populated, while Yunnan was resource-rich, thus attracting French attention. If the Qing asserted its dominance of Guangdong in the negotiations, the French could use that assertion as an excuse to violate the Yunnan border. Westerners are meticulous in their ways, Deng said, and Qing officials must be careful in striking a balance between Qing and French interests. Cixi endorsed Deng's view and praised Deng for his clarity of thought.<sup>73</sup>

The surveying of the Guangdong-Vietnam border was one of the clauses in the Treaty of Tientsin. Deng hoped that the Qing rulers and bureaucrats could cooperate and protect Guangdong and Yunnan from French territorial ambition. However, Qing officialdom was divided over the way in which the border should be demarcated. The more bellicose officials argued that the French should abandon their positions in Indochina and withdraw from Tonkin; they urged the court to invalidate the peace settlement and resume the war. Other officials wanted France to respect Chinese trading rights in Tonkin.<sup>74</sup> The most ardent memorialist on the issue was Zhang Zhidong, who had organized Guangdong's defenses with Peng Yulin 彭玉麟 (1816-1890), who distinguished himself under Zeng Guofan by suppressing the Taiping Rebellion in lieu of Li

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<sup>73</sup> Deng, "Deng Chengxiu kanjie riji," 117.

<sup>74</sup> Wang, *Qingliu yanjiu*, 268–269.

Hongzhang. Zhang Zhidong's effective defenses not only deterred the French from attacking Guangdong, but also secured China's military victories over the French on land.<sup>75</sup> After the war, Zhang Zhidong remained in Guangdong and received Deng's entourage. For Deng he hired French interpreters and specialists who knew how to survey geographical terrains and use the data to make maps. Deng did not have to acquire sophisticated cartographical techniques himself; he was responsible for supervising the experts and negotiating with French diplomats and cartographers across the Guangdong-Vietnam border.<sup>76</sup>

### *Perceptions and Misperceptions*

Meanwhile, Zhang Zhidong submitted three petitions advocating that Deng maximize Qing gains in surveying the border, concerned that France would haggle and rob China of its most strategic locations.<sup>77</sup> He deployed troops from Hainan and stationed them along the Guangdong-Vietnam border to intimidate the French.<sup>78</sup> As a native of Guangdong, Deng was grateful for Zhang's actions, which he regarded as appropriate and informed.<sup>79</sup> Cixi, however, wanted to resolve the border issue quickly and normalize relations with France. She preferred for Deng to expedite his work by not being bogged down by the amount of land that the Qing could claim. The

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<sup>75</sup> Li, *Muliao yu shibian*, 92-93.

<sup>76</sup> Li, *Muliao yu shibian*, 106-107.

<sup>77</sup> Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, *Zhang Zhidong quanji* 張之洞全集 (The Complete Writings of Zhang Zhidong) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1998), 5078.

<sup>78</sup> Li, *Muliao yu shibian*, 123.

<sup>79</sup> Deng, *Yubingge zouyi*, 508.

Guangdong-Vietnam border was not her priority; she did not want the French to resume war.<sup>80</sup> She instructed Deng not to spend his time scouring historical texts and old British and Chinese maps to delineate the border. Rather, she suggested, Deng should try to accommodate reasonable French requests by giving up claims to territory that was either useless to China or had been incorporated into Vietnam.<sup>81</sup> In reality, the conundrum boiled down to misperceptions. Deng and Zhang thought that the French not only aimed to sever Vietnam's tributary relationship with China, but also coveted the southern Chinese provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, Sichuan, and Yunnan. But all the French wanted, at least at the time, was a clearly marked border that would force the Vietnamese to honor their previous agreements and keep the Chinese off Vietnamese territory. Contrary to Chinese perceptions, the French were more interested in trade and border rectification than in territorial acquisition.<sup>82</sup>

From the Qing legation in France and other sources, Zhang Zhidong gathered that French opinion was divided on whether to annex or abandon Tonkin. He also knew that the French were experiencing financial and logistical difficulties in establishing a protectorate over Vietnam. He thus advised Deng Chengxiu to delay the negotiations until conditions were tilted in China's favor.<sup>83</sup>

While Deng agreed that he should stall for time, he was not entirely pleased that Zhang was

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<sup>80</sup> Zhongguo shixuehui 中國史學會, ed., *Zhong Fa zhanzheng* 中法戰爭 (The Sino-French War) (Beijing: Xin zhishi, 1955), 3.

<sup>81</sup> Deng, *Yubingge zouyi*, 519-521.

<sup>82</sup> Lewis M. Chere, *The Diplomacy of the Sino-French War (1883-1885): Global Implications of an Undeclared War* (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Cultural Publications, 1988), 2-3.

<sup>83</sup> Deng, *Yubingge zouyi*, 388-390.

interfering in his work. Moreover, he knew that stalling for time would incur Cixi's wrath, so he proposed seeking her opinion on Zhang's proposal.<sup>84</sup> Surely enough, Cixi was getting impatient, especially after the French complained to the Zongli Yamen that they would break negotiations if Deng continued to make excuses and not compromises.<sup>85</sup> She urged that he and Li Bingheng 李秉衡 (1830–1900), who was responsible for surveying the Guangxi-Vietnam border, expedite their work because the lesson of Qiying 耆英 (1787–1858) loomed. Qiying was responsible for negotiating a peace agreement with Britain and France to conclude the Second Opium War (1856–1860), which had progressed against the Qing's favor. According to Qing annals, Qiying betrayed the trust of the Xianfeng emperor by exaggerating British fears and respect for the Qing and misreporting British intentions. His deceit led to the Qing court's inaccurate assessment and hindered the peace settlement, and so Qiying was forced to commit suicide.<sup>86</sup> By invoking Qiying, Cixi threatened Deng and Li with consequences if they “continue to delay and overlook the overall situation” (*wanyan, zhi wu daju* 玩延, 致誤大局).<sup>87</sup>

But Deng Chengxiu's deputy Li Xingrui 李興銳 (1827–1904) proved to be a greater obstacle to his work. If Cixi's plan was to keep the surveying team divided between officials of different affiliations and personalities so that she could maintain ultimate control, she succeeded. Li Xingrui

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<sup>84</sup> Deng, *Yubingge zouyi*, 397.

<sup>85</sup> Deng, *Yubingge zouyi*, 421–423.

<sup>86</sup> Chao-ying Fang, “Chi'i-ying (Kiying),” in *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644–1912)*, Vol. 1, edited by Arthur William Hummel (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 131–134.

<sup>87</sup> *Da Qing Dezong Jinghuangdi shilu* 大清德宗景皇帝實錄 (Veritable records of the Emperor Dezong of the Great Qing) (Taipei: Hualian, 1964), 224.20b.

had followed Zeng Guofan in suppressing the Taiping Rebellion and was closely aligned with the Yangwu movement. Likely following Li Hongzhang's advice, he submitted a memorial to the court claiming that Deng had been fixated on the surveying and had ignored the imperatives of conducting diplomacy and cultivating friendly relations with the French. Li Xingrui complained that he could no longer work under Deng, who was stubborn and not receptive to suggestions, and wanted to return to Longzhou near the Guangxi-Vietnam border where he had been based. According to Li Ciming, Li Xingrui dealt a fatal blow to Deng's credibility and reputation because he was widely known as a "steady and honest" (*laocheng pushi* 老成樸實), a man unlikely to make groundless accusations.<sup>88</sup> Zhang Zhidong tried to resolve Deng's differences with Li Xingrui, but to no avail.<sup>89</sup>

### *The Final Nail in the Coffin*

Li Hongzhang might not have any grudge against Deng, but he had adopted a conciliatory approach to dealing with the French and persuaded Cixi to not provoke them unnecessarily. At that time, Deng had fallen ill and petitioned Cixi to leave the border for treatment, but Cixi ordered that he first complete his assignment. Meanwhile, the French negotiators threatened that they would take the disputed territories by force if the Qing government refused to acquiesce.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Li Ciming 李慈銘, *Yuemantang guoshi riji* 越縯堂國事日記 (The diary of Yueman Hall [on state affairs]), Vol. 6 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1978), 3607.

<sup>89</sup> Li, *Muliao yu shibian*, 270.

<sup>90</sup> Li, *Yuemantang guoshi riji*, Vol. 6, 3607–3608. For the criticisms of Deng's work, see Wang, *Qingliu yanjiu*, 270–272.

Finally, Li Xingrui, without informing Deng Chengxiu but likely with the blessings of Cixi and Li Hongzhang, promised the French that the Qing would cede ten *li* of territory on the eastern border of Guangdong. When Deng told Li Xingrui that the cession could jeopardize Qing fortifications and place much of Guangdong under the threat of French cannons, the latter replied, “In dealing with Westerners, one must be forthright and fast” (*yu Xiren shuohua, biyao shuangkuai fang hao* 與西人說話, 必要爽快方好), suggesting that Deng, unlike Yangwu officials, had not grasped the art of managing foreign matters.<sup>91</sup> Li Xingrui informed Deng that breaking the promise could aggravate Sino-French relations. Deng replied that the cession could embolden the French to further encroach on Qing territory. They had a bitter quarrel, which ended with Li Xingrui reporting to be sick and leaving Deng—Cixi approved Li’s sick leave.<sup>92</sup>

Deng did not miss Cixi’s preferential treatment. He eventually realized that she was more interested in suing for peace with the French than defending the military and political interests of the Qing. In 1887, his task near completion, he proposed that the Qing uphold their interests when negotiating with the French, only to be reprimanded by Cixi for engaging in “empty talk” (*xuyan* 虛言).<sup>93</sup> A month later, in the second month of Guangxu 13 (1887), Deng finished his task and abided by Li Xingrui’s prior agreement with the French. He bemoaned to Zhang Zhidong that such

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<sup>91</sup> Deng, “Deng Chengxiu kanjie riji,” 156.

<sup>92</sup> Li Xingrui 李興銳, *Li Xingrui riji* 李興銳日記 (The diary of Li Xingrui) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987), 125–126. For the controversies, see Li Jinming 李金明, “Zhong Fa kanjie douzheng yu beibuwan haiyu huajie” 中法勘界鬥爭與北部灣海域劃界 (The struggle over the surveying of the Sino-French border and the demarcation of territorial waters in Beibu Gulf), *Nanyang wenti yanjiu* 南洋問題研究 102, no. 2 (2000): 76–89.

<sup>93</sup> Zhu, *Guangxu chao donghua lu*, Vol. 2, 2217–2218.

a conclusion was beyond his expectation.<sup>94</sup> Although the court thanked him for a job well done and approved his sick leave, Deng decided to quit office. The court failed to dissuade him, and he returned to Guangdong.<sup>95</sup> His odyssey in officialdom was complete.

## Conclusion

The Sino-French War posed far-ranging implications for China. The war removed Vietnam from the Chinese tributary system, catalyzed the rise of Chinese nationalism, and prompted some reassessment of the Yangwu movement. Qingliu censors and Hanlin academicians were either purged or silenced. To avoid further criticisms and restore Chinese pride, Li Hongzhang became “a suppressor of non-Sinocentric reports from Japan,” or reports that denied the Confucian worldview of cosmological kingship and the notion of Chinese superiority.<sup>96</sup> Zhang Zhidong became convinced that China needed to learn from the West and implement institutional changes in order to survive.<sup>97</sup> Deng Chengxiu committed himself to transforming classical education into schooling patterned after the Western model—a new endeavor in his life, albeit at the end of it.

When Deng Chengxiu returned to Danshui, the people lined the streets to welcome and praise him as the pride of their locale. He soon founded the Chongya Academy (Chongya shuyuan 崇雅書

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<sup>94</sup> Deng, *Yubingge zouyi*, 576.

<sup>95</sup> Jin, *Jinshi renwu zhi*, 195.

<sup>96</sup> Douglas R. Reynolds, *East Meets East: Chinese Discover the Modern World in Japan, 1854-1898: A Window on the Intellectual and Social Transformation of Modern China* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2014), 2.

<sup>97</sup> Li, *Muliao yu shibian*, 130.

院) in Danshui, which offered a mix of classical (Confucian) classes alongside primary courses on Western learning and hands-on policies of bureaucratic governance, such as currency, irrigation, and taxes. For centuries, scholar-officials who attained fame in serving the court had founded academies, which were more prestigious and lucrative than private clan schools, in their hometowns when they retired. Deng was just one of them. Nevertheless, instead of founding a classical academy that taught a Confucian curriculum with no Western subject matter,<sup>98</sup> Deng followed a growing trend, amidst a rapid expansion of public charitable schools in the post-Taiping period, by establishing a school patterned after the Western model to train a new generation of hybrid scholars. He went against the attempt by the Qing court, prior to 1901 when it decreed the transition of classical academies into schools of Western learning, to build new Confucian educational institutions and restore old ones as a part of post-Taiping recovery. Given the prevalence of the sale of offices, which helped propel Deng's career, and irregular paths to success outside the civil examinations, the Qing court was addressing the need to validate Confucian learning and its regular path to a bureaucratic career "even as the state itself looked to other sources of national strength."<sup>99</sup> Given how Deng's career took an irregular path, his founding of the Chongya Academy was unsurprising.

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<sup>98</sup> Barry C. Keenan, *Imperial China's Last Classical Academies: Social Change in the Lower Yangzi, 1864–1911* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1994), 3-4.

<sup>99</sup> Keenan, *Imperial China's Last Classical Academies*, 10. Post-Taiping classical academies offered student stipends to boost enrollment and hired lower-degree holders as teachers. They helped resolve the issues of unemployment and social dislocation of the local educated elite until the expansion of academies paradoxically raised the unemployment rate among graduates.



But at the same time, Deng began as a Confucian scholar, even though he had never attempted the metropolitan examinations. He read Confucian texts and admired Zhu Ciqi 朱次琦 (1807–1881), a New Text Confucian who emphasized individual moral rectitude, engagement with the world, and statecraft learning above philosophical and textual questions.<sup>100</sup> In 1891, when Zhu's student Kang Youwei established the Wanmu Academy 萬木書院 (Thatched Hall of Ten Thousand Trees), which encouraged a radical rethinking of Confucian learning and broadened its curriculum to include translations of Western books, Deng recommended Ou Jujia 歐榘甲 (1870–1912), his most precocious student, to study under him—Ou would champion the idea of a federated China.<sup>101</sup> Shortly after Ou's transfer, Deng passed away in Danshui in 1892.

As an aspiring bureaucrat outside the political networks that produced high-ranking ministers and Hanlin academicians, Deng Chengxiu bought his passage to Beijing and enjoyed the literary pursuits of elite metropolitan officials, who dominated court politics. Weng Tonghe finally patronized him and he gained imperial favors for remonstrating against frontier officials and Yangwu advocates who had purportedly defied the court.

After the Sino-French War, Deng Chengxiu was responsible for surveying the Guangdong–Vietnam border, despite a lack of cartographical knowledge. Psychologically, his founding of Chongya Academy and endorsement of Western sciences in his twilight years might have made up

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<sup>100</sup> Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885–1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 30. For the origins of Kang's ideas, see Benjamin A. Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Qing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>101</sup> Li Shaoling 李少陵, *Ou Jujia xiansheng zhuan* 歐榘甲先生傳 (A biography of Ou Jujia) (Taipei: Daye, 1960), 6–8.

for what he lacked in his formative years. He was disappointed with Cixi and Yangwu officials, who refused meticulous surveying in favor of a quick reconciliation with the French. Like Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen after him, Deng Chengxiu contributed suggestions for improving the workings of government but failed to find a receptive audience in the imperial bureaucracy. With the Chongya Academy, Deng Chengxiu might have hoped to train a new generation of scholars well versed in both Confucian and Western learning, scholars who would no longer be slighted by Yangwu bureaucrats and who would play a more significant role in late Qing politics despite being excluded from national political networks.

## **Chapter Three: Qiu Fengjia and the Purpose of Modern Education**

### **Introduction**

For many Chinese who live under Nationalist and Communist rule in modern China, the Qing Empire's military defeats by foreign imperialists are instances of "national humiliation" that scarred the souls and bodies of their peace-loving ancestors. Under the impression that they were the victims of imperialism finally awakened from their stupor, the Chinese participated in mass politics and reclaimed not only the glory of a millennia-old civilization but also their dignity and rights that had been denied by feudal dynasties of despotic, self-serving rulers. The twentieth-century narratives of awakening and victimhood are now repeated with renewed conviction and fervor by the incumbent mainland Chinese government, which has vowed to lead the Chinese people to build China into a great power as the next step toward genuine national resurgence.<sup>1</sup>

Historians have generally agreed that Chinese literati organized the mass politics that were necessary for the rise of nationalism in the last decades of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). China, similar to other modern nations, was imagined by literati and actualized by their non-elite followers, but the reason that people left "real" communities for an invented

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<sup>1</sup> For discourses on national humiliation, see *Louise Edwards, Women Warriors and Wartime Spies of China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); *John Fitzgerald, Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); and *Zheng Wang, Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Chinese nation has not been adequately explained. Qing China had the features of a modern nation-state: a common language (a written script standardized by civil examinations), ethnicity (the Han majority as opposed to the Manchu rulers of the Qing era), religion (Confucianism or ancestral worship), and the sense of belonging to a lasting polity (an imperial state that was founded and maintained by ancient kings and sages); its literati had only to reconfigure these features to construct the Chinese nation.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Idea of Proto-Nationalism*

The bonds of nationhood in terms of culture, language, ethnicity, religion, and primordial linkages are “proto-national” and exist as variants of feelings of collective belonging that can be appropriated in a modern nation-state. Such bonds are not necessarily related to the territorial political unit of the nation. As historian Eric Hobsbawm suggests, their meaning and relevance must be elaborated by literati and introduced through education before they are part of the political vocabularies required to form a nation.<sup>3</sup>

By conceiving of the relationship between proto-national bonds and modern nationalism in terms of connections rather than continuities, Hobsbawm rejects the idea of a

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<sup>2</sup> Henrietta Harrison, *China: Inventing the Nation* (London: Hodder, 2001); Diana Lary, *China's Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and Its Indigenes Became Chinese* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Nicolas Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 46–47.

primordial link between proto-nationalism and modern nationalism. In the Euro-American context, modern nationalisms made nations by developing political institutions, political objectives, and political claims for the sovereign rights of specific national populations. As Lloyd S. Kramer explains, the two claims that a nation's sovereignty lies in its people rather than in a king or social elite and that individuals in these sovereign nations have fundamental rights to liberty and legal equality constitute modern nationalism. The American and French Revolutions promoted new forms of political identity by claiming to represent the sovereign will of entire national populations and the legal rights of all citizens.<sup>4</sup>

But in the case of late Qing China, nationalism was not merely introduced from the West. The intuitive sense that the Chinese nation was “natural” and objectively real, as well as a widely shared sense of despair that the Qing state was endangered beyond salvation, had begun to emerge after China's shock defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the conquest of Beijing by foreign armies during the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901).

Conceptualized by primarily Chinese, Japanese, and Turkish intellectuals, Pan-Asianism became an important step in the transition from Confucian universalism, or the worldview of “all under heaven,” to loyalty to a future Chinese nation. In the wake of China's defeat in its war with Japan, Chinese literati disliked Japan amidst a surge of Chinese nationalism. But a

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<sup>4</sup> Lloyd S. Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America: Politics, Cultures, and Identities since 1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 29–30. See also Oliver Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe, 1890–1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 18–23.

burst of reform sentiment also ensued, and the nationalistic movement was quickly geared toward accepting Japanese influence. Chinese literati, concerned about the decline and possible partition of the Qing Empire in the face of foreign imperialism, began to view Japan as a model rather than an enemy.

Paradoxically, that Japan had defeated China against overwhelming odds gained their admiration. At the same time, Japan required Chinese assistance in stemming the advance of France, Germany, and especially Russia on its commercial and territorial interests in China and Korea.<sup>5</sup> While promoting their own agendas, both Chinese and Japanese officials and intellectuals began advocating that they shared a common culture and race (*tongwen tongzhong* 同文同種). Primarily a reaction to Western imperialism, Pan-Asianism provided China with a nationalist emphasis on the ideas of solidarity and cultural superiority found in Confucianism and variants of an essentialized Chinese tradition.<sup>6</sup>

In late Qing China, then, proto-nationalism was an intermediate, transitional phase on the way to modern nationalism whereby a large part of the population would owe their affiliation entirely or considerably to the nation over—or at least alongside—family, lineage,

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<sup>5</sup> France, Germany, and Russia were the “tripartite group” that forced Japan to relinquish its territorial gains in China’s Liaodong Peninsula and reduce its control of Korea after the First Sino-Japanese War.

<sup>6</sup> For the “Golden Decade” (1898–1908) of Sino-Japanese cooperation against Western imperialism, see Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1898–1912: The Xinhai Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1993). The admiration and emulation of Japan began to subside around 1905, when Japan’s victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) exposed its expansionist aims at China’s expense. The Chinese became suspicious of Japanese “charity” and saw political designs in it. See Marianne Bastid, *Educational Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China*, translated by Paul J. Bailey (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1988), 81.

village, county, and province. Modern nationalism would be characterized not only by the individual's identification with the nation-state, but also by "the general acceptance of a multi-state system of other sovereign (and competing) national entities," as suggested by Chinese literati's acceptance of Japan and other nations and peoples as their equals.<sup>7</sup>

Prasenjit Duara has suggested how local communities and the imperial state were able to inscribe their own interpretations on myths and cultural symbols, broaden the "interpretive arena," and redefine these myths or symbols as they saw fit. This layering of interpretation that accumulated over time, known as "superscription," created a common cultural vocabulary in which the Chinese could articulate their views without compromising the validity of other interpretations.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, Chinese literati had to superscribe most—or ideally, all—affiliations, which would reinforce the national identity, in a process commonly known as nation building. Proto-nationalism could thus play out in the administrative divisions of a future nation, such as the county or province of an existing empire, kingdom, or even nation. Comprised of a series of interrelated developments, proto-nationalism remained part of the polity that was the Qing Empire, even as it gradually undermined the imperial state's

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<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Smith, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 391. See also Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Prasenjit Duara, "Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War," *Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (1988): 778–795.

ideological and political foundations. Rejecting the self-strengthening efforts of an extremely small group of Manchu princes and Chinese governors, Chinese literati at the turn of the twentieth century sought to appeal to both conservative and liberal elites as well as to the rank and file of the Chinese people. “Provincial patriots”—literati and officials bound by the common goals of strength and unity—began to advocate popular sovereignty and infuse in the people—elite, literate, or otherwise—a sense of collective responsibility for the imagined nation’s fate.<sup>9</sup> Familiar themes of Chinese proto-nationalism at this time included anti-imperialism (hostility to foreign conquest and exploitation), identification with a glorious epoch or tradition, and superiority of Chinese culture.

In most nation-building projects, affordable if not compulsory education is a strategy for creating commonalities and promoting a set of shared goals, symbols, and visions that are prescribed by literati and political leaders to forge a homogeneous nation from an amalgam of languages, ethnicities, and religions. The twentieth-century Qing and Republican governments dispatched legions of civilizing schoolteachers and civil servants into the “backward” countryside, where they suppressed local dialects and religious or “superstitious” practices and imposed a modern, unified “Chinese” bureaucracy and culture.

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen R. Platt, *Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). The literati and officials in late Qing Hunan regarded Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1616–1682), an erudite, anti-Manchu scholar native to their province, as their patron saint and looked to his deeds and writings for political inspiration.



The results of these civilizing missions were mixed. The people in counties and villages often spoke a creolized variety of the standardized idiom because resources for education were spread thin. Religious specialists and practitioners rebranded their rituals as “culture” and “tradition” and professed dual loyalties to locality and nation. When education and persuasion failed, bureaucrats resorted to more coercive methods to display authority and enforce loyalty, ranging from social surveys and ethnic classifications to heavier land taxation and military conscription to augment or display their power.<sup>10</sup>

The issue with these “makings of modern China” lies in their teleology: they assume that the indifference of non-national or nationally ambivalent communities to nationalism and nation-building projects was a premodern relic—“a reflection of local, regional, dynastic, or religious loyalties that were gradually wiped out by the forces of modernization, state building, and modern mass politics.”<sup>11</sup> The concept of proto-nationalism thus allows for an understanding of these loyalties and modern nationalism as mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive categories in modern Chinese history.

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<sup>10</sup> For a sample of the numerous “makings of modern China,” see Xiaoping Cong, *Teachers’ Schools and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State, 1897–1937* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007); Tong Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-State, 1900–1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Huaiyin Li, *Village Governance in North China, 1875–1936* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Thomas Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Nicolas Schillinger, *The Body and Military Masculinity in Late Qing and Early Republican China: The Art of Governing Soldiers* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Helen M. Schneider, *Keeping the Nation’s House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Tara Zahara, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 98.

### *Key Arguments*

This chapter examines the efforts by Qing-dynasty literatus Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912) to promote modern education and proto-nationalism among the people of Guangdong Province prior to the establishment of a republican China in 1911. An exile who was evicted from his “real” community of Taiwan—he led a resistance movement against Japan’s takeover of the island after the First Sino-Japanese War—Qiu Fengjia was a proto-nationalist who attempted to advance an educationist agenda by invoking feelings of a shared destiny. Through his popular and highly acclaimed poems, with which he was able to make like-minded literati friends in Guangdong, he suggested that the main reason for the fall of the Taiwan Republic (Taiwan minzhuguo 臺灣民主國) was the apathy of the people of Guangdong; many settlers of Taiwan had arrived from Guangdong, and Qiu Fengjia could also trace his ancestry back to Guangdong. After his “return” to Guangdong, Qiu Fengjia deployed the resources of the provincial government and Southeast Asia’s (Nanyang 南洋) overseas Chinese and founded academies where the Confucian classics (*jingxue* 經學) were taught alongside Western sciences (*bowu* 博物, or broad learning concerning the nature of things).<sup>12</sup> The academies set up by Qiu Fengjia were local in their origins but supported by

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<sup>12</sup> However, late Ming and early Qing literati had already started to use both *bowu* 博物 and *gezhi* 格致 (the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge) as epistemological frameworks to accumulate and disseminate classical and practical knowledge. See Benjamin A. Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550–1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 29.

the overseas Chinese, most of whom came from Guangdong and were convinced to pool their resources to provide for the public good in their hometowns.

This chapter suggests that Qiu Fengjia's sense of loss and betrayal was the main impetus for his educational activities, whose aims related more to developing people's knowledge (*minzhi* 民智) and virtue (*minde* 民德) than to achieving political changes at either the provincial or national level. Although he became involved with politically subversive activities, he avoided them in public. He was hardly a fully-fledged nationalist or someone who championed political individuality or the unification of select majority groups (anti-Qing activists were generally anti-Manchu and could easily be accused of Han chauvinism), but he imagined a Chinese proto-nation that could have saved the Taiwan Republic. His proto-nationalism combined an instrumental adoption of Japan's model with a non-violent resistance to foreign imperialism, be it American, European, or Japanese. By focusing on Qiu Fengjia's activities at the turn of the twentieth century, this chapter demonstrates that Chinese proto-nationalism was not entirely anti-foreign (motivated only by the desire to remove all foreign influence from China), parochial (characterized by allegiances to only immediate professional or territorial groups), and violent (exemplified by the Boxer Rebellion). Being intermediate and transitional, proto-nationalism did not represent a distinct stage of historical development. Proto-nationalism was bound by cultural,

linguistic, and native-place affiliations, which Qiu used to forge a sense of community with his Guangdong and Nanyang compatriots.<sup>13</sup>

That Qiu Fengjia was a fundraiser among the overseas Chinese, liberal educational reformer, and creator of a historicist tradition through poetry distinguished him from the capitalist-oriented “modern gentry” of the late Qing and early Republican periods, who have been characterized as a heterogeneous and scattered group by Marianne Bastid.

In Bastid’s study of Jiangsu scholar and entrepreneur Zhang Jian 張謇 (1853–1926), the modern gentry (*shenshang* 紳商), who comprised dismissed or retired officials and holders of degrees and academic titles, became “modern” by participating in commercial activities such as banking, industry, or enterprises that had a capitalist nature, were managed by compradores, or ran on foreign capital. Some modern gentry remained indistinguishable from the old elite, who enjoyed traditional privileges and, through their contacts, had indirect links to global capitalism. For Zhang Jian, private enterprise would benefit from the teaching of technical subjects in schools that were staffed by foreign-language instructors and industrial specialists. Zhang Jian passed the metropolitan examinations and received the highest *jinshi* 進士 title, but he eventually resolved to develop the industrial capacity of Nantong, his home district. Zhang Jian believed that education and industry were

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<sup>13</sup> For a different definition of Chinese proto-nationalism, see En-han Lee, *China’s Quest for Railway Autonomy, 1904–1911: A Study of the Chinese Railway-Rights Recovery Movement* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1977), 1–2.

complementary pillars of strength for the nation; modern education could produce a generation of technical specialists and “rescue the nation through industry” (*shiye jiuguo* 實業救國). Local affairs, often mishandled by inept officials, should be left in the hands of dedicated, educated locals.

Nevertheless, Jiangsu’s modern gentry, who were represented by Zhang Jian, did not aspire to national prominence, and a “national consciousness” hardly developed among them. As Bastid explains, although the modern gentry had nationalist reactions, their preoccupations were practical, seldom ideological, and ultimately limited to the district or provincial level.<sup>14</sup> Bastid’s argument, based on a state-versus-society dichotomy, cast doubt on the primordialist claims of inherited Chinese historiography, which suggests that local elites had become revolutionary by 1911–1912 when the Qing dynasty fell.<sup>15</sup> The Guangdong gentry also shared the “non-national” outlook of their Jiangsu counterparts. Unlike Zhang Jian, however, Qiu Fengjia did not develop his own business; he instead turned to the overseas Chinese for funds to build modern schools. In contrast to the well-endowed schools founded by Jiangsu’s modern gentry, Qiu Fengjia’s schools across Guangdong consistently lacked funds and subsisted on government subsidies and Nanyang Chinese

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<sup>14</sup> Bastid, *Educational Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China*.

<sup>15</sup> For examples, see Mary Backus Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); Joseph Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin, eds., *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); R. Keith Schoppa, *Chinese Elites and Political Change: Zhejiang Province in the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

donations. Moreover, unlike the modern gentry's schools that became unpopular with the conservative, established gentry who were upset with increased tax burdens and the housing of schools in temples, Qiu Fengjia's schools encountered less resistance in the Chaoshan 潮汕 (Chaozhou 潮州 and Shantou 汕頭) region in eastern Guangdong, where compradores and merchants, engaged in maritime trade, outnumbered the landed gentry and supported the learning of practical knowledge, such as geography, mathematics, and foreign languages, that was useful for trade. The comparison of Qiu Fengjia and Zhang Jian thus reveals different local, provincial approaches to the economy and network of education in China at the turn of the twentieth century.

### *Chapter Outline*

This chapter comprises three sections. The first section examines Qiu Fengjia's resistance to the Japanese takeover of Taiwan and suggests that the trauma he experienced bred a sense of betrayal and loss, which inspired his poetry and views of the Chinese nation. The second section analyzes his pedagogical views and educational activities in the Chaoshan region, Guangdong, which became his adopted home. The third section explores his regional network and the ways in which it functioned as a precursor to overseas Chinese involvement with political developments in twentieth-century China.

## Trauma and the Taiwan Republic

### *The Early Life of Qiu Fengjia*

Born into a Hakka-speaking family in Taiwan, Qiu Fengjia was a precocious child who practiced pugilism with his martial-artist grandfather and studied the Confucian classics under his father, a poor schoolteacher and local graduate (*shengyuan* 生員).<sup>16</sup> When Qiu Fengjia was thirteen, his father took him to Tainan, the old capital, where he passed the local examinations. With his classical erudition and poetic flair, Qiu Fengjia impressed the Fujian provincial governor, Ding Richang 丁日昌 (1823–1883), who administered the examinations and called Qiu Fengjia “the talented scholar of Dongning” (Dongning caizi 東寧才子).<sup>17</sup>

When Qiu Fengjia came of age, Tang Jingsong 唐景崧 (1841–1903), the governor of Taiwan, recruited him into the provincial administration. A bibliophile who had served in the Hanlin Academy and fought in the Sino-French War (1884–1885), Tang Jingsong mentored Qiu Fengjia at his Haidong Academy (Haidong shuyuan 海東書院), where Qiu studied rare books, court annals, and translations of Western works. In 1888, Qiu Fengjia passed the

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<sup>16</sup> Though a prodigious poet, Qiu Fengjia wrote no autobiography or memoir. According to his son, Qiu Niantai 丘念臺 (1894–1967), Qiu Fengjia’s immediate ancestors migrated from Zhenping County, Meizhou Prefecture (in Guangdong), during the Jiaqing reign (1796–1820). See Qiu Niantai 丘念臺, *Wo de fendou shi* 我的奮鬥史 (Taipei: Zhonghua ribao, 1981), 1–11; and also Su Yunqing 蘇雲青, *Nian zi zai zi: Qiu Niantai zhuan* 念茲在茲：丘念臺傳 (Taipei: Jindai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1984), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Dongning was Ming loyalist Zheng Chenggong’s (1624–1662) name for Taiwan when he led Taiwan to resist Qing rule. See Chien-hsin Tsai, *A Passage to China: Literature, Loyalty, and Colonial Taiwan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2017), 57–58.

provincial examinations, and in 1889, he passed the highest metropolitan examinations. Qiu Fengjia then served as a secretary (*zhushi* 主事) at the Board of Works (*gongbu* 工部) in Beijing, the imperial capital, and observed how the court was mired in profligacy and corruption. Disillusioned with imperial politics, Qiu Fengjia quit office and returned to Taiwan, where he did not have to work with effete, overbearing colleagues and could apply himself more productively to educating the youth in Taiwan.<sup>18</sup>

Back in Taiwan and with his scholarly reputation well established, Qiu Fengjia was invited to lecture at various academies in Chiayi, Taichung, and Tainan. Although his mastery of the classics, poems, and prose continued, the focus of Qiu Fengjia's scholarly interests shifted to geography, history, and current affairs. He used Chinese-language newspapers from Hong Kong and Shanghai to introduce Western concepts and institutions and to alert his students to the precarious geopolitical environment of Qing China.<sup>19</sup>

By the time the First Sino-Japanese War broke out, Qiu Fengjia had gathered a group of high-minded individuals who were dedicated to the defense and development of Taiwan in Taichung. This indicated the rise of a "Taiwanese" community as opposed to the localized

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<sup>18</sup> Xu Bodong 徐博東 and Huang Zhiping 黃志萍, *Qiu Fengjia zhuan* 丘逢甲傳 (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 1996), 42–47.

<sup>19</sup> Qiu Chenbo 丘晨波, "Qiu Fengjia nianpu" 丘逢甲年譜, in *Qiu Fengjia wenji* 丘逢甲文集 (The collected writings of Qiu Fengjia), edited by Qiu Chenbo (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1994), 379.



identities that had marked the presence of Han settlers on the Taiwan frontier since the seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup>

### *A Snapshot of Precolonial Taiwan*

Many Han settlers in Taiwan had arrived from Fujian and Guangdong, especially in the 1870s and 1880s, after Taiwan was elevated to provincial status due to foreign designs on the island. The Taiwan provincial authorities took steps to modernize the infrastructure and boost the defenses of Taiwan: soldiers from Guangdong and Guangxi were stationed, roads were laid, and a predominantly British treaty-port community in Tamsui, north of Taipei, was founded. Prior to the Japanese takeover, Taiwan was becoming a modern, model Qing Chinese colony.<sup>21</sup> However, as Andrew Morris rightly suggests, the colonialism of Qing modernizers and well-connected merchant elites—both Han and Western—alienated the earlier settler population and left this population with few means and little desire to resist the Japanese in 1895.<sup>22</sup>

But a minority of the Han elite settlers, newly arrived or otherwise, wanted to resist the Japanese takeover in 1895, but they encountered tremendous obstacles in organizing

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<sup>20</sup> Niki Alsford, *Transitions to Modernity in Taiwan: The Spirit of 1895 and the Cession of Formosa to Japan* (London: Routledge, 2018), 6. For Qing colonization, imperialism, and orientalism of Taiwan, see Emma Jinhua Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683–1895* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Alsford, *Transitions to Modernity*.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Morris, "The Taiwan Republic of 1895 and the Failure of the Qing Modernizing Project," in *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan*, edited by Stéphane Corcuff (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 20.

resistance. The Han Chinese generally feared attacks by indigenous tribesmen from the surrounding mountains. The Hoklo Chinese of Fujianese ancestry were alarmed over the arms and training that the local Hakkas (who included Qiu Fengjia) had received. The local Hakkas were the traditional rivals of the Hoklo Chinese on the plains and were equipped by the elite community of Taipei, led by Tang Jingsong, to prepare for resistance. The ill-disciplined, largely unwelcome mainland troops under Liu Yongfu 劉永福 (1837–1917), another military hero of the Sino-French War, caused more apprehension than reassurance as they moved around Taiwan. Tang Jingsong never fully trusted Liu Yongfu and diverted most mainland divisions to the south of the island. He encouraged the deployment of local militias and entrusted the defense of the mid-island districts to Qiu Fengjia, who became responsible for the defensive build-up in central Taiwan.<sup>23</sup>

### *Qiu Fengjia's Petitions*

Despite the preparations, the elite settlers of Taiwan understood that their resistance would be futile without support from the mainland and diplomatic intervention by foreign powers. If Tang Jingsong and Liu Yongfu were, respectively, the civilian and military leaders of Taiwan's resistance, then Qiu Fengjia was its ideologue, articulating Taiwan's anxieties and rejection of impending Japanese rule in his petitions to the Qing court, transmitted

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<sup>23</sup> Harry J. Lamley, "The 1895 Taiwan War of Resistance: Local Chinese Efforts against a Foreign Power," in *Taiwan: Studies in Chinese Local History*, edited by Leonard H.D. Gordon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 23–76, and esp. 35.

through his superior Tang Jingsong.<sup>24</sup> He took the initiative in organizing gentry opposition to the surrender of Taiwan to Japan and penned strongly worded petitions to the Qing court that urged renegotiations with the Meiji government.<sup>25</sup>

In his first petition, Qiu Fengjia wrote that he and other Qing subjects in Taiwan had vowed to protect the island with their lives. Given their resolve, Qiu Fengjia wrote, “how could the emperor bear to abandon us (*huangshang...he ren qi zhi* 皇上...何忍棄之)?”<sup>26</sup> As imperial and mainland assistance was not forthcoming, he resorted to more rousing rhetoric in his second and third petitions. Qiu Fengjia accused the Guangxu 光緒 emperor (r. 1875–1908), Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧 (1835–1908), and court ministers of deserting the people of Taiwan without a care (*anxin qi wo Taimin* 安心棄我臺民); with such blatant disregard for its subjects in Taiwan, he continued, the Qing court would lose the hearts of the people and find it difficult to rule “all under heaven” (*Taimin yi yi, chaoting shi renxin heyi zhi tianxia* 臺民已矣，朝廷失人心何以治天下).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Qiu Fengjia was serving in the paramilitary and in a semi-official capacity and could not submit petitions directly to the throne. See Huang Xiuzheng 黃秀政, *Taiwan gerang yu yiwei kang Ri yundong*, 臺灣割讓與乙未抗日運動 (The cession of Taiwan and the 1895 anti-Japanese resistance movement) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1992), 87. Historians and the biographers of Qiu Fengjia have confirmed that several of Tang Jingsong’s memorials, including the four petitions to be discussed later in this section, were written by Qiu Fengjia. See *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 260.

<sup>25</sup> For background on the establishment of the Taiwan Republic, see Xu Jidun 許極燉, *Taiwan jindai fazhan shi* 臺灣近代發展史 (A history of modern developments in Taiwan) (Taipei: Qianwei, 1996), 153–200.

<sup>26</sup> Qiu Fengjia, *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 260. See also Wang Yanwei 王彥威, ed., *Qingji waijiao shiliao* (*Guangxu chao*) 清季外交史料 (光緒朝) (Historical materials on foreign relations in the Qing period, Guangxu reign), *juan* 109 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1964 [1930]), 5. For the four petitions of Qiu Fengjia, see *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 260–262.

<sup>27</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 261.

Qiu Fengjia's fourth and last petition analogized the cession of Taiwan to a child's loss of his father and mother. Reluctantly accepting Taiwan's abandonment by the Qing court (*fucha Taiwan yi wei Qingting qidi* 伏查臺灣已為清廷棄地) but resolutely rejecting its cession to Japan, he had no choice but to form an independent Taiwan Republic with the gentry and seek diplomatic assistance from the Western powers. Nevertheless, he also made it clear that Taiwan's declaration of independence was ultimately a desperate act of loyalty to the Qing court.<sup>28</sup> The Zongli Yamen 總理衙門 (the Qing institution responsible for managing affairs related to foreigners inside China) responded that although it understood the pleas of the people of Taiwan, Taiwan was not as strategically important as Beijing. This indicated its preference for concluding the war with Japan and reluctance to allow tensions to linger or escalate. The Qing court issued an edict commanding the people who wanted to remain Qing subjects to evacuate to the mainland and requesting its officials in Taiwan to cooperate and aid in the handover of Taiwan to Japan.<sup>29</sup>

### *The Founding of the Taiwan Republic*

On May 23, 1895, Tang Jingsong declared Taiwan a sovereign republic of which he would serve as president.<sup>30</sup> In his declaration titled "Taimin bugao" 臺民佈告 (A notice to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>29</sup> Wu Micha 吳密察, *Taiwan jindaishi yanjiu* 臺灣近代史研究 (Research on modern Taiwan history) (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1990), 11.

<sup>30</sup> In a secret dispatch to the Qing court, Tang Jingsong explained that he was forced by the people of Taiwan to assume the presidency. He would seek an opportunity to relieve himself of this duty (*tuoshen* 脫身) and return

the people of Taiwan), which was penned by Qiu Fengjia, Tang Jingsong emphasized that given the inability of the Qing court and foreign powers to rescue them from Japan “the people of Taiwan” (*Taimin* 臺民) had no choice but to rule themselves as a temporary expedient (*Taimin weiyou zizhu, tuiyong xianzhe, quanshe Taizheng* 臺民惟有自主，推擁賢者，權攝臺政) until the issue was resolved. The *Taimin*, comprised of people from Fujian and Guangdong, would continue to welcome settlers from those provinces. Together, the declaration read, they would defend Taiwan to the death (*wanzhong yixin, shitong sishou* 萬衆一心，誓同死守).<sup>31</sup>

The Taiwan Republic, which effectively lasted for a mere ten days, could well have been Asia’s first modern republic, with its own (albeit hastily drafted) constitution, flag, laws, and parliament. Although the founders of the Taiwan Republic had a superficial understanding of the concept of a republic, they hoped to win Western support with their talk of republican ideals and institutions. They even proposed to hold a referendum and allow the people of Taiwan to decide if they wanted to become part of Japan.<sup>32</sup>

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to beg for forgiveness (*qingzui* 請罪). See *Zhong Ri jiaoshe shiliao xuanji* 中日交涉史料選輯 (Selected historical materials on the Sino-Japanese postwar negotiations) (Taipei: Datong shuju, 1995), 409–410. Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909), Tang Jingsong’s mainland patron and Li Hongzhang’s political rival, opposed the cession of Taiwan and proposed that Tang trade mining rights for Western protection against the Japanese takeover. See *Zhong Ri jiaoshe shiliao xuanji*, 152–53, 209–11, and 393–94.

<sup>31</sup> “Taiwan bugao”, cf. Huang, *Taiwan gerang yu yiwei kang Ri yundong*, 123–124. In an earlier telegram to the Qing court, Tang Jingsong had suggested that the people of Taiwan were united as one and could not be separated (*wanzhong yixin, wucong fenjie* 萬衆一心，無從分解). See *Zhong Ri jiaoshe shiliao xuanji*, 212.

<sup>32</sup> Wu Micha, *Taiwan jindaishi yanjiu*, 12.

The Taiwan Republic thus anticipated aspects of a modern Chinese nation that was eager to appeal to foreign opinion and concerned with international legitimacy and respectability. Under Tang Jingsong and Qiu Fengjia, the new republic asserted the natural rights of the people to defy imperial orders and defend their homes. But at the same time, they maintained that their declaration of independence was a reluctant act. In a subsequent notice to the people of Taiwan, they declared that the Taiwan Republic would use the Chinese calendar and pay tribute to prove its allegiance to the imperial court.<sup>33</sup> Without acknowledging it, they were following the example of the Zheng clan, a maritime “Chinese” regime that had ruled Taiwan in the late seventeenth century and had wanted to sue for peace with the Qing Empire by accepting its legitimacy and becoming its vassal.<sup>34</sup>

A “Republican International” never came into being to rescue Taiwan, given that Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia had their own geopolitical concerns. The great powers were content to have Japanese forces retreat from Liaodong and refused to further antagonize Japan to the benefit of their rivals, and they saw the Taiwan Straits as falling within Japan’s sphere of influence.<sup>35</sup> Within days, the leaders of the republic lost confidence, and Tang Jingsong fled to Xiamen on June 5. The militias and soldiers who stayed—mostly Guangdong conscripts, who had been bandits and pirates and had little sense of belonging to

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<sup>33</sup> Wang Bingyao 王炳耀, ed., *Jiawu Zhong Ri zhanji* 甲午中日戰輯 (Historical materials on the First Sino-Japanese War). Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1966), 243–44.

<sup>34</sup> Xing Hang, *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard H. D. Gordon, “Taiwan and the Powers, 1840–1895,” 93–110.

the Taiwan Republic—either deserted their posts or looted the shops and municipal offices in Taipei.<sup>36</sup> Unsurprisingly, those who remained in Taipei welcomed the restoration of order and the arrival of the new Japanese governor on June 14.<sup>37</sup>

Qiu Fengjia, who had pledged to perish with Taiwan, left for Quanzhou in August—an event that marred his reputation to some degree. In a redemptive poem that was written after he arrived in Guangdong, Qiu Fengjia blamed his departure on Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), who had negotiated the cession of Taiwan with the Japanese: “The Prime Minister [Li Hongzhang] had the power to cede territories; I have no power to salvage the situation.”<sup>38</sup> In an 1896 poem, Qiu Fengjia insisted that abandoning Taiwan had not been his original plan and vowed that he would return to Taiwan. He never did.<sup>39</sup> He urged the helpless (*guchen* 孤臣) and loyalist (*yichen* 遺臣) bureaucrats and exiles who had similarly fled Taiwan to “remember the Han official rites.”<sup>40</sup>

### *Living the Choice to Leave Taiwan*

Qiu Fengjia’s lyric poetry was, as Chien-hsin Tsai suggests, an expression of trauma that was linked to the loss of his homeland in Taiwan—Taiwan would be lost if he did not

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<sup>36</sup> Huang Xiuzheng, *Taiwan gerang yu yiwei kang Ri yundong*, 262–63.

<sup>37</sup> Wu Degong 吳德功, *Rang Tai ji* 讓臺記 (A record of the cession of Taiwan) (Taipei: Taiwan yinhang, 1959), 31–73.

<sup>38</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 78, 98.

mention it in poetry.<sup>41</sup> The common, recurring themes of his poems that were composed in the wake of the fall of the Taiwan Republic were abandonment, betrayal, and loss. Speaking for loyalists (*yimin* 遺民) similar to him, Qiu Fengjia often described how helpless he felt in Taiwan without imperial support and how lonely he was in Guangdong, his ancestral yet adopted province to which he had “returned,” without the public understanding that he had been forced to flee Taiwan. His yearning for the island was torture, he wrote, because he thought that Cixi and Li Hongzhang had nonchalantly sacrificed Taiwan filled him with despair.<sup>42</sup> His 1896 trip to Hong Kong, a Qing territory that was ceded to Britain, reminded him again of his beloved Taiwan.<sup>43</sup> Qiu Fengjia lamented that, like the famous Southern Song general Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103–1142), he could not defy the imperial order to relinquish the fight and had to retreat to the mainland as a temporary measure.<sup>44</sup>

Although he lauded the settlers of Taiwan who had either killed themselves or had become monks, Qiu Fengjia contended that suicide was not an option, because he had assumed the responsibility of recording the heroic deeds of his militiamen for posterity. Life as an exile was difficult, he wrote, because no “pure land” (*jingtu* 淨土) existed in the mainland that was dotted with churches and foreign concessions, the sight of which shattered

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<sup>41</sup> Tsai, *Passage to China*, 97.

<sup>42</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 72–73.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.



him—his dislike for Western power, or preference for Japan’s model, would show in his educational activities.<sup>45</sup> Traumatized by his experiences in Taiwan, he struggled to find “new aspirations to heroism” to assuage his anxiety and, perhaps, his guilt.<sup>46</sup>

Heroism and martyrdom existed for the nation. Historian Huang Xiuzheng 黃秀政 has suggested that the Taiwan Republic’s armed resistance to the Japanese takeover, with its use of “knives and spears” (*daoqiang* 刀槍), displayed a form of proto-nationalism (*yuanxing minzu zhuyi* 原型民族主義). In the following decades, as the subjugated but increasingly educated people of Taiwan gradually rejected violent means of resistance, they became subtler in reacting against Japanese colonial policies and thus created the modern nationalism (*jindai minzu zhuyi* 近代民族主義) of Taiwan.<sup>47</sup> Although Huang has rightly emphasized the role of education in fomenting nationalism, he views the Taiwan Republic as a mere continuation of the Sino-Japanese conflict in 1895.<sup>48</sup>

However, in terms of founding principles and the political institutions that its leaders were trying—or pretending—to build for their “nation” bound by culture, language, and especially native-place affiliations, the Taiwan Republic was a prototype of the future

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>46</sup> Tsai, *Passage to China*, 93. Some of Qiu Fengjia’s fellow exiles from Taiwan felt just as betrayed and disgruntled, including Hong Qisheng (1867–1929), who wrote that the fall of the Qing dynasty was imminent because whenever a state was coming to an end, it would first abandon its people [to save itself]. See Hong Qisheng 洪棄生, *Yinghai xiewang ji* 瀛海偕亡記 (A record of escape in Yinghai) (Taipei: Taiwan yinhang, 1959), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Huang Xiuzheng, *Taiwan gerang yu yiwei kang Ri yundong*, 290.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 330.

Republic of China, as Qiu Fengjia would suggest at the end of his life. Not merely an unintended consequence of the Sino-Japanese postwar agreement, the Taiwan Republic continued to inspire its advocates and defenders, whose memories of it lived on in their literary writings and practical work in China and elsewhere.

### **Education, Poetry, and the Guangdong Connection**

#### *A Perceived Sense of Misunderstanding*

Perhaps what depressed Qiu Fengjia most was not the indifference of Qing monarchs and ministers; the indifference of the Guangdong gentry and people to Taiwan's predicament and isolation had caused him greater distress and exasperation, especially when he now had to experience this loss in Guangdong. Given that the people of Guangdong had contributed manpower and materials to defend Taiwan during the Sino-French War, he was greatly disappointed that they were almost silent when the Japanese moved to annex Taiwan.<sup>49</sup> For what Qiu Fengjia considered a valiant fight on his part against overwhelming odds, he was now seen as a coward by the Guangzhou literati because he had fled rather than becoming a martyr as he had pledged. Qiu Fengjia was even accused of absconding with funds that were to have been used for the defense of Taiwan—a charge that he vehemently denied.<sup>50</sup> Feeling the “sorrows of a guest” (*kechou* 客愁; *ke* 客 is the ethnonym of the Hakka people) and

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<sup>49</sup> Qiu Fengjia, *Qiu Fengjia ji*, 759.

<sup>50</sup> Qiu Niantai, *Wo de fendou shi*, 78.

“ordered” by the court to return to his ancestral home in Haiyang (near Chaozhou) where he no longer had any kin.<sup>51</sup> With nowhere to fulfill his aspirations, Qiu Fengjia could only write and sell his essays to eke out a living.<sup>52</sup>

In 1896, Qiu Fengjia left for Chaozhou, a major city in eastern Guangdong, having resolved to teach at an academy. As he told his son Niantai 念臺 some years later, the failure of the Taiwan Republic to avert the Japanese takeover had originated from political apathy and a lack of education among the people of both Taiwan and China as a whole; the Taiwan Republic had sought help from its mainland compatriots but had received no response. If only the people’s intelligence (*minzhi* 民智) had been broadened, the Japanese would not have annexed Taiwan so easily, because the people of Fujian and Guangdong would have rallied to defend it. Qiu Fengjia wanted to educate the “unresponsive people” (*wuying zhe* 無應者) in his adopted province and make them aware of the plight of Taiwan.<sup>53</sup>

Although the Guangdong literati were noticeably more concerned about the implications of the cession of Taiwan for national prestige and sovereignty than about the desires and feelings of the people of Taiwan, they had not been apathetic toward them. The cession shocked Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) and the provincial graduates (*juren* 舉人) of Guangdong, who beseeched the court to reconsider the decision. How could the

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<sup>51</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 45.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>53</sup> Xu and Huang, *Qiu Fengjia*, 120–21.

emperor, the father of the realm, bear to desert tens of thousands of his innocent children in Taiwan, the petition queried. If Taiwan were ceded, the petition continued, it would soon be Guangdong's turn to succumb to foreign occupation. The Guangdong petitioners pleaded with the Qing court to renegotiate the status of Taiwan for the benefit of both the nation (*guo* 國) and their homes (*jia* 家).<sup>54</sup> Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) convened a meeting with more than one thousand examination candidates from across the Qing empire in Beijing where they discussed the cession of Taiwan and demanded that the Qing court withdraw from the Treaty of Shimonoseki.<sup>55</sup>

Qiu Fengjia may have overstated his case when he claimed that the people of Guangdong were oblivious to the agony of abandonment and loss in Taiwan, but it was true that the people of Taiwan had received little more than token support from Guangdong, with which Taiwan shared deep cultural and linguistic affinities. According to Qiu Fengjia, Guangdong was obliged to aid Taiwan. As he sat in quiet anger, Qiu Fengjia called himself “The Exile from Taiwan” (*Taiwan zhi yimin* 臺灣之遺民) when he first arrived in Guangdong.<sup>56</sup> With its deep-water harbors for extensive trade with Southeast Asia and riverine access to Chinese hinterland markets, Guangdong was a prize for imperialism and was no less coveted than Taiwan. Fearing that the cession of Taiwan would embolden similar

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<sup>54</sup> *Zhong Ri jiaoshe shiliao xuanji*, 252–55.

<sup>55</sup> Wu Micha, *Taiwan jindaishi*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Jiang Quan, “Qiu Canghai zhuan,” 456.

imperialistic incursions into Guangdong (given the province's proximity to British, French, and Japanese spheres of influence), Guangdong literati wondered how the court would react to future territorial claims to their province; the cession of Hong Kong and the "loss" of Vietnam did little to allay their anxieties.<sup>57</sup> But most of them remained indifferent to Kang Youwei's proposals to reform the bureaucratic structure; their priorities were fundamentally local and quite literally provincial.<sup>58</sup>

### *A Career in Education*

The aftermath of the First Sino-Japanese War thus provided the favorable conditions under which Qiu Fengjia could conduct his educational activities and redeem his faltering reputation. In retrospect, as Qiu Fengjia had suggested, Guangdong was the perfect site to conduct political and social experiments because, similar to Fujian, it had "pioneered a new atmosphere" (*kai fengqi zhi xian* 開風氣之先) for its exposure to foreign ideas, institutions, and settlers and because of its proximity to overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia.<sup>59</sup> In 1897, he moved to Hanshan Academy in Chaozhou. Although Chaozhou was smaller and less prosperous than Guangzhou, it had a tradition of scholarship that could be traced back to the

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<sup>57</sup> Wu Micha, *Taiwan jindaishi*, 8–9.

<sup>58</sup> For Edward J.M. Rhoads, the real shock for the Guangdong literati came during the 1900–1901 Boxer Rebellion, in which China was defeated and Beijing was sacked by a coalition of foreign troops. See Edward J. M. Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: The Case of Kwangtung, 1895–1913* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 36.

<sup>59</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia ji*, 774.

tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>60</sup> The gentry class in Chaozhou, which had been uprooted by a seventeenth-century coastal evacuation order designed to weaken the Zheng regime in Taiwan, posed fewer obstacles to Qiu Fengjia's reforms.<sup>61</sup> The prefect of Chaozhou, Li Shibin 李士彬 (1835–1913), was a friend and reformist official, so Qiu Fengjia enjoyed official endorsement in implementing his reforms.<sup>62</sup>

A prescient educator, Qiu Fengjia de-emphasized preparations for the examinations before they were abolished in 1905. In place of eight-legged essays (the format that was prescribed for the written examinations), he discussed poetry and current affairs at the Hanshan Academy. He practiced Liang Qichao's idea of a "poetic revolution" by deploying poems as a device to interpret political developments and address practical concerns.<sup>63</sup> In the poems that were written during his stay at the academy, Qiu Fengjia expressed the desire to cultivate talent to save the nation, although his attempt was fraught with obstacles.<sup>64</sup> The main obstacle remained the conservative Chaozhou literati who disputed his "unorthodox"

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<sup>60</sup> Chen Zhanshan 陳占山, *Song Yuan Chaozhou Yanjiu: Haibin Zou Lu de jueqi* 宋元潮州研究：海濱鄒魯的崛起 (Research on Song-Yuan Chaozhou: the rise of Zou-Lu on the seas) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Chaozhou lineages had to rebuild their clans and ancestral halls after the Qing navy subdued the Zheng regime in 1683. See Huang Ting 黃挺, *Shiliu shiji yi lai Chaoshan de zongzu yu shehui* 十六世紀以來潮汕的宗族與社會 (The lineage and society of Chaoshan since the sixteenth century) (Guangzhou: Jinan daxue chubanshe, 2015).

<sup>62</sup> Zheng Xifu 鄭喜夫, *Minguo Qiu Canghai xiansheng nianpu* 民國滄海先生年譜 (A chronological biography of Qiu Fengjia) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1981), 120–21.

<sup>63</sup> Xiaobing Tang, "'Poetic Revolution,' Colonization, and Form at the Beginning of Modern Chinese Literature," in *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*, edited by Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), 248.

<sup>64</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 90–91.

subjects and discredited him and Li Shibin. The modern academies, these literati protested, had diverted resources and students away from traditional schools. Not wanting to implicate Li Shibin, Qiu quit and moved to Dongshan Academy in Chaoyang County, where he continued to educate students about China's precarious existence.

The guiding theme of Qiu Fengjia's lectures was the implications of imperialism for China. By 1898, he had come to believe that Russia, rather than Japan, posed the greatest threat to the Qing Empire. Russia's designs on Liaodong and Korea had indirectly forced Japan's hand in the 1894 war, and Russia was a hostile and opportunistic power that shared a long border with China. Qiu Fengjia emphasized the absurdity of extraterritorial rights and unequal treaties and was resentful that the "useless" (*zhui 贅*) Qing ministers and negotiators had callously signed away the rights of their subjects without considering the feelings or welfare of people of ceded territories and foreign concessions.<sup>65</sup>

In 1898, when the Guangxu emperor took Kang Youwei's counsel and began to institute a constitutional monarchy, Qiu Fengjia was hopeful. Although he believed that reforms to erode the power of the traditional elite should be gradual and that the people should be educated about their rights and responsibilities before such reforms took place, the plan to establish a standardized, state-led education system was promising. Qiu Fengjia welcomed the emphasis on training technical specialists who would possess practical,

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 294–95.

problem-solving skills to strengthen China. As a practitioner of martial arts, he was interested in building strong bodies through sports and physical education and had even prepared a treatise on military discipline and training for the court's reference.<sup>66</sup> His hopes were dashed when Cixi and her conservative allies launched a coup and thwarted Guangxu's reforms. He mourned the six reformers executed by Cixi for their involvement in the failed reforms and hinted at his disappointment and frustration with Cixi in his poems.<sup>67</sup>

### *The Purpose of Poetry*

Qiu Fengjia confided in Qiu Shuyuan 邱菽園 (1874–1941), a famous poet based in Singapore, that his poems were a subtle protest against the manacles of regressive and repressive politics. He had a troubled past as a disgraced leader of the Taiwan Republic and wanted to avoid putting his family at risk of retribution from the imperial authorities. Qiu Fengjia had not wanted to become a poet, but poems were a safety valve through which he could express his discontent with the court and especially Cixi. He hoped that his works would survive to become “poem-history” (*shishi* 詩史) one hundred years later.<sup>68</sup> Qiu Fengjia sought inspiration from history and most admired Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 267.



1283), who had defended the Southern Song dynasty against invading Mongol troops to the bitter end. With some friends, he erected a temple in Wen Tianxiang's honor.<sup>69</sup>

Qiu Fengjia's laudation of Wen Tianxiang represented, in the first half of the twentieth century, "the cult of the heroic past"—"a repository of distinctive national virtues in the face of military menace."<sup>70</sup> Wen Tianxiang's martyrdom reminded Qiu Fengjia that although men and the dynasties for which they die do not endure, the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice is immutable and eternal. Qiu Fengjia was determined to inherit the loyalist tradition and extend the heroes' legacies. His gestures were performative; whether he should pursue martyrdom or reclaim Taiwan was irrelevant.<sup>71</sup>

### **Proto-Nationalism and the Overseas Chinese**

#### *Qiu Fengjia's Friends in Guangdong*

Qiu Fengjia's self-fashioning into a liberal educational reformer and attempts to create a historicist tradition through poetry earned him friends in Guangdong, some of whom were well acquainted with Japanese scholars.

Many Japanese intellectuals were worried about China's increasingly threatened position in Asia. They argued that China and Japan, which shared a common script and race

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 298–300.

<sup>70</sup> See Wai-Keung Chan, "Contending Memories of the Nation: History Education in Wartime China, 1937–1945," in *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China*, edited by Tze-ki Hon and Robert J. Culp (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 198.

<sup>71</sup> Tsai, *Passage to China*, 97.

(*tongwen tongzhong* 同文同種), should cooperate in resisting Western imperialism. They thought it was unfortunate that the two nations had fought: Japan should deploy its newfound strength to revive China and prevent its partition by the Western powers.<sup>72</sup>

These Japanese intellectuals also urged China to emulate Japan and hire Japanese teachers at new modern academies. With the support of Chinese scholars, they formed organizations such as the Society for a Common Language (Toa Dobunkai 東亜同文会), which trained both Chinese and Japanese experts in education and cultural cooperation. The Society went on to establish Japanese-medium schools in the treaty-port cities of Shantou and Shanghai.<sup>73</sup> It also founded a similar academy in Chaozhou, but it lacked official and gentry support and closed down within a year.<sup>74</sup> The Japanese government encouraged Chinese students to study in Japan and generously defrayed their expenses, further gaining the goodwill of Chinese literati and officials.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The Japanese scholar who was most representative of this opinion, and most vocal in expressing it, was Atsumaro Konoé 近衛篤磨 (1863–1904). See Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 54–55.

<sup>73</sup> Reynolds, *China, 1898–1912*, 45.

<sup>74</sup> Wu Rongqing 吳榕青, “Qingmo Chaoshan liangdi tongchuang Lingdong tongwen xuetang buzheng” 清末潮汕兩地同創嶺東同文學堂補證 (Supplementary evidence on the joint establishment of Lingdong Academy in Chaozhou and Shantou), *Hanshan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 韓山師範學院學報, no. 5 (2015): 122. Historians had believed that the Japanese-backed academy in Chaozhou was Lingdong Academy’s predecessor. Upon further research, however, it was found that they were separate institutions. For this new finding, see Chen Jinghui 陳荊淮, “Qiu Fengjia yu Lingdong tongwen xuetang ruogan shishi kaozheng” 丘逢甲與嶺東同文學堂若干史實考證 (An analysis of selected historical materials on Qiu Fengjia and Lingdong Academy), *Shantou daxue xuebao* 汕頭大學學報 22, no. 6 (2006): 81–85.

<sup>75</sup> Reynolds, *China, 1898–1912*, 29.

One of Qiu Fengjia's closest friends was Liang Jushi 梁居實 (1843–1911), a Guangdong scholar-official and diplomat to Japan who had close connections to pan-Asianist Japanese scholars. Liang Jushi approached Qiu Fengjia to establish an academy in Guangdong that would be staffed by Japanese technical specialists. In his letters, Liang Jushi explained that he found Qiu Fengjia “extremely knowledgeable about Chinese and Western literature and proficient in the Hakka and Teochew languages” (*shentong Zhong Xi wenxue, jian an Chao Jia zhi yu* 深通中西文學，兼諳潮、嘉之語) and foresaw that he could successfully establish a Japanese-supported academy in the Chaoshan region.

Liang Jushi noted that the people of a nation could sustain the nation even if it ended; its essence was their intelligence, which had to be developed through newspapers, schools, and translations. Liang Jushi indicated that he understood Qiu Fengjia's hostility to Japan. Nevertheless, in agreement with the pan-Asianist Japanese scholars, he reasoned that China should learn from Japan, an Asian nation of the same racial stock. For Liang Jushi, an academy teaching Japanese and translated works would benefit adult learners, who could master Japanese faster than they could the European languages. He concluded that Japan offered both a shortcut to Western learning and an example of how education could save a nation and preserve a race; an intelligent people would never be extinct.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Liang Jushi 梁居實, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji* 梁詩五先生遺稿集 (The collected writings of Liang Jushi) (Taipei: Liang Weichang, 1959), 82–85.

Convinced by Liang Jushi, Qiu Fengjia quit his teaching positions and devoted himself to creating a new academy in Shantou, a treaty-port city near Chaozhou. According to historian Huang Ting 黃挺, the modernization of education in the Chaoshan region occurred after the Opium War (1839–1842) and intensified after the Boxer Rebellion, when the Qing court began converting all classical academies (*shuyuan* 書院) into modern academies (*xinshi xuetang* 新式學堂).<sup>77</sup> In the Chaoshan region, three types of modern academies existed: missionary academies (*jiaohui xuetang* 教會學堂), government academies (*guanban xuetang* 官辦學堂), and public academies (*minban xuetang* 民辦學堂). Government academies in the provincial capitals became university-level institutions (*da xuetang* 大學堂), prefectural academies became middle schools (*zhong xuetang* 中學堂), and county-level academies became elementary schools (*xiao xuetang* 小學堂).<sup>78</sup> The failure of the Japanese-medium school in Chaozhou convinced Qiu Fengjia that the new academy would have to be funded, at least partially, by state institutions if it was to stay solvent and independent of gentry control.

In his letters to Qiu Shuyuan and Liang Jushi, Qiu Fengjia revealed that conservative forces (*shouyu zhi shi* 守愚之勢) protested the founding of the proposed academy.<sup>79</sup> He

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<sup>77</sup> Huang Ting 黃挺, “Jindai Chaoshan jiaoyu gailun” 近代潮汕教育概論 (An overview of education in modern Chaoshan), *Hanshan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 韓山師範學院學報, no. 3 (1997): 9.

<sup>78</sup> Barry C. Keenan, *Imperial China's Last Classical Academies: Social Change in the Lower Yangzi, 1864–1911* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 266–68.

decided on the treaty-port of Shantou rather than Chaozhou, where he encountered great resistance from the gentry, who, despite being less established and powerful than those in Guangzhou, remained a formidable foe to educational reforms. He was also motivated by the positive editorials and reports on educational reforms in *Lingdong Daily* (*Lingdong ribao* 嶺東日報), the dominant newspaper in Shantou.<sup>80</sup> In Shantou, he was welcomed by merchants and left-behind families of Nanyang sojourners, who benefited from trade and remittances and could appreciate his proposal for teaching what they regarded as practical subjects, such as geography, mathematics, and foreign languages, useful for commercial engagement with the outside world.

With government support, Qiu Fengjia raised funds, hired Japanese instructors, procured equipment and furniture, and secured a suitable site on which to build the academy. Endorsed by the imperial state, he received donations from even the conservative gentry in Shantou, who wanted their names inscribed on the school plaque honoring them as its founders.<sup>81</sup> Qiu Fengjia named his new academy the Lingdong Academy of Combined Learning (*Lingdong tongwen xuetang* 嶺東同文學堂). Its main media of instruction would be Japanese, Hakka, and Teochew (both the expressions “dongwen” 東文 and “tongwen”

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<sup>80</sup> Cheng Guoqiang 程國強 and Zheng Yin 鄭茵, “Cong shuyuan dao xuetang: yi 1898–1905 nian de Chaoshan diqu wei li” 從書院到學堂：以 1898–1905 年的潮汕地區為例 (From classical academies to modern academies: the case of academies in the Chaoshan region, 1898–1905), *Hanshan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 韓山師範學院學報, 5 (2008): 18.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 17.

同文 referred to the Japanese language).<sup>82</sup> In 1899, Lingdong Academy was founded as the first government school (even though it was publicly initiated) and first Japanese-medium school in the Chaoshan region.<sup>83</sup>

### *A Pan-Asianist in the Making*

Increasingly a pan-Asianist convert, Qiu Fengjia did not consider emulating the numerous missionary schools in the Chaoshan region. Contrary to Qiu Fengjia's vision, missionary schools taught the importance of the individual and his faith in God rather than his duties toward the nation. Missionary schools also emphasized biblical studies at the expense of Confucian learning, which he intended to keep.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, as suggested by his poems written in colonial Hong Kong, he viewed Western powers more negatively than Japan. For him, churches and missionary schools were symbols of Western imperialistic power. Qiu Fengjia's proto-nationalism was thus not characterized by a hatred of Japan. Rather, it made him more receptive to Japan's model. Like the modern gentry and revolutionary elite of his time, he did not display the violent xenophobia of the masses.<sup>85</sup> With hopes of improving China's conditions based on the Japanese model, he divorced "Japan" from its geopolitical or imperialist context and equated it with more abstract markers,

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<sup>82</sup> Chen, "Qiu Fengjia yu Lingdong tongwen xuetang ruogan shishi kaozheng," 85.

<sup>83</sup> Huang, "Jindai Chaoshan jiaoyu gailun," 10–11.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>85</sup> Bastid, *Educational Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China*, 18.

including its education and modernization. Whether he resisted or accepted Japan, he was motivated by his desire to save China.

While Japan offered inspiration, Southeast Asia provided funds and emotional support. A friend and local official persuaded the Guangdong provincial government to sponsor Qiu Fengjia's trip to Southeast Asia, where he could observe the overseas Chinese communities and compile a report for the authorities' reference. In a letter to this friend, Qiu Fengjia commented that he had remained quiet for five years, but his desire to serve the court in his own way had never faltered. He wrote that he had begun to "unite the Fujian and Guangdong merchants and people of Nanyang settlements" (*lianhe Nanyang ge bu Min Yue shang min zhi ju* 聯合南洋各部閩粵商民之舉), who began to appreciate his efforts.<sup>86</sup>

Qiu Fengjia was invited by Qiu Shuyuan to Singapore, where he raised funds and met Yung Wing 容闳 (1828–1912), the first Chinese-Guangdong student to graduate from an American university. Aided by Qing consulates in Malaya (another example of government support for his educational activities), Qiu Fengjia also visited Kuala Lumpur, Melaka, Penang, and Pontianak where he met local dignitaries and Chinese community leaders. He observed the deplorable living conditions of Chinese laborers under colonial rule and delivered rousing, engaging speeches in southern Chinese dialects. Qiu Fengjia invoked the common ties of culture, geography, language, and tradition that were shared by the southern

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<sup>86</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 284.

Chinese provinces and the overseas Chinese and asked that they support education and “save up human talent” (*chu rencai* 儲人才) in mainland China so that they and their descendants would not have to leave home again.<sup>87</sup>

China faced a real danger of being partitioned, Qiu Fengjia argued; should it occur, it would be a “collective disaster” (*gonghuo* 公禍) unlike a change of dynasty that befalls only the ruling clan.<sup>88</sup> His three months abroad allowed him to meet friends, make acquaintances, and raise 10,000 dollars for the Lingdong Academy.<sup>89</sup> In the spring of 1901, the academy conducted its first classes in Shantou.<sup>90</sup> Qiu Fengjia served as its founding principal and directed the institution based on the guidelines that he drafted in 1899.

### *Developing Intelligence*

In his 1899 “Preface to Establishing the Lingdong Academy of Combined Learning” (*Chuangshe Lingdong tongwen xuetang xu* 創設嶺東同文學堂序), Qiu Fengjia explained the relationship between the people’s intelligence and national strength. The nation is strong when the people are intelligent and weak when the people are ignorant, he wrote. Japan and the Western powers deployed education to strengthen themselves and emphasized practical learning. In contrast, China continued to uphold “useless learning” (*wuyong zhi xue* 無用之

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<sup>87</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia ji*, 773.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 823–27.

<sup>89</sup> Qiu, “Qiu Fengjia nianpu,” 158–61; Xu and Huang, *Qiu Fengjia*, 149–52.

<sup>90</sup> Qiu, “Qiu Fengjia nianpu,” 66.



學), disregard Western scholarship, or apply foreign ideas only superficially; therefore, it was weak and near extinction. For Qiu Fengjia, although Confucian learning remained useful for building the character and culture of the Chinese people, the civil examinations with which it was associated had enervated the nation and failed to prepare the people for national crises. The eight-legged compositions of scholar-officials had not stopped the creation of foreign concessions. Even well-intentioned officials, who succeeded in gaining the opportunity to serve the ruler after they passed the examinations, found themselves helpless to stop the partition of China, which seemed increasingly likely. China's partition would be a disaster for the Chinese people—Indian subjects were discriminated against by their British rulers, and the Vietnamese elite had never served as judges in their own courts.<sup>91</sup>

Qiu Fengjia had, in effect, declared the primacy of the people over the state—if the state for any reason fails to act or has even betrayed the interests of the nation, then the people should act for themselves. He rejected the notion that the purpose of education was to help Confucian scholars serve the court. For Qiu Fengjia, the objective of education was individual self-empowerment and self-improvement, which would help individuals to become intelligent and then serve their nation—self-improvement and acts to help others improve themselves were considered a form of loyalty. To prevent foreign colonization and defeat foreign imperialism, Qiu Fengjia suggested that the Chinese people abandon useless learning

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<sup>91</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 301–302.

before it was too late. The basis of a strong China, Qiu Fengjia maintained, lay in nurturing talent and founding academies. He hoped his efforts could inspire a nationwide movement to “save the nation through education” (*jiaoyu jiuguo* 教育救國). He determined that the Lingdong Academy, as if to echo Zhang Zhidong’s famous axiom, would deploy “Chinese learning for substance and Western learning for function” (*Zhongxue wei ti, Xixue fu zhi* 中學為體，西學輔之). The Lingdong Academy would offer instruction on *The Conversations of Master Zhu* (*Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類) and dynastic histories for students to become morally upright and have an astute sense of the Chinese past. Its curriculum would also include science (*gezhi* 格致), chemistry, physiology and hygiene, mathematics, and other subjects that were commonly available at Western schools. Its teaching staff comprised Chinese graduates of American and British universities and retired Japanese military officers, who would be responsible for supervising courses on shooting and sports.

Qiu Fengjia believed that the graduates of the Lingdong Academy could apply their knowledge to lift China from its problems. He stressed that although the academy had been founded in Shantou by Chaoshan elites, it would also serve the Hakkas of Jiaying and the Hoklos of southern Fujian.<sup>92</sup> In Shantou, Chaoshan merchants enjoyed cordial relations with

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 303–305.

their trading partners from Jiaying and southern Fujian, and so Qiu Fengjia had to cater to the educational needs of its diverse business community.<sup>93</sup>

### *Attempts Unappreciated*

Qiu Fengjia's attempts to promote hybrid, modern, and Western-oriented education across southeastern China displeased the literati, who were protective of their privileges and traditional scholarship. They petitioned the court and accused Qiu Fengjia of committing seditious, vainglorious acts in the guise of education. In his own defense, Qiu Fengjia argued that his vision of education would allow the Confucian teachings to stay relevant in changing times and that the glories of the Chinese civilization could be restored by considering Western practices. For him, Japan had succeeded in becoming powerful because the Japanese “revered the [Zhou] king by expelling the barbarians” (*zunwang rangyi* 尊王攘夷). He advised the Chinese to patiently learn from the West until they grew sufficiently strong to expel the invaders—Japan provided an excellent example by defeating the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). The court understood local complaints against Qiu Fengjia as reactions to its own New Policies, and it left Qiu alone.<sup>94</sup>

Petitions suggesting that Qiu Fengjia plotted to topple the Qing regime by shielding Kang Youwei or Sun Yat-sen's 孫逸仙 (1866–1925) revolutionaries also failed to prompt

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<sup>93</sup> Wu, “Qingmo Chaoshan liangdi tongchuan Lingdong tongwen xuetang buzheng,” 125.

<sup>94</sup> Xu and Huang, *Qiu Fengjia*, 169–77.

the authorities to action because of a lack of evidence. These petitions did not mention Qiu Fengjia's "ignominious defeat" in Taiwan, which was by then considered "heroic resistance" against foreign imperialism by both reformers and revolutionaries—his reputation as a traitor was cleared.<sup>95</sup>

The charges that were leveled against Qiu Fengjia were unfounded. Although he was sympathetic to both Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen and had helped their followers to evade arrest, he had no intention of changing the political structure or toppling the imperial regime. Historians Xu Bodong 徐博東 and Huang Zhiping 黃志平 have suggested that Qiu Fengjia supported the reformers (*weixinpai* 維新派) or the royalists (*baohuangpai* 保皇派) under Kang Youwei before changing sides to the revolutionaries under Sun Yat-sen.<sup>96</sup> However, Qiu Fengjia was clearly inspired more by Liang Jushi and the pan-Asianist Japanese intellectuals than by the reformers-royalists in his pedagogical principles. In his fundraising campaigns in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, he rallied support solely on the basis of his ideas about education and was viewed by Kang Youwei and his disciple Liang Qichao as a competitor for Nanyang donations.<sup>97</sup> Qiu Fengjia grew to dislike Kang Youwei for his arrogance, elitism, and allegedly underhand methods of soliciting funds for his political

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 225–26.

<sup>96</sup> Xu and Huang, *Qiu Fengjia zhuan*, 183–239. Qiu Fengjia severed all ties with Kang Youwei in 1910, when his industrialist-friend Liu Shiji 劉士驥 (1857–1909) was assassinated, allegedly on Kang's order, over a financial dispute.

<sup>97</sup> Xia Xiaohong 夏曉虹, *Yanyuan xuwen lu* 燕園學文錄 (The collected writings of Xia Xiaohong) (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011), 197–98.

activities, but he also did not publicly endorse the revolutionaries—or, at least, his support for them was not obvious. Although he reportedly anticipated that the independence of provinces, not revolutionary armies, would lead to the downfall of the Great Qing,<sup>98</sup> Qiu Fengjia preferred that his students focus on their studies rather than join politically subversive movements. He impressed on his friends and supporters the consequences of China's partition and advocated education as a means to forestall it or restore the nation even if it were to be carved up by foreign powers. In his formula for national survival, the nation was defined not by the ruler or the government but by the people and their intelligence. An intelligent people, he suggested, could resurrect a nation either during its decline or after its demise. The intelligence of a people was best characterized by their willingness and ability to acquire practical knowledge and apply it to benefit the nation.

### *Engaging with Tradition*

Qiu Fengjia's "return" to purportedly ancient Confucian origins (as part of a proto-nation's identification with a glorious age or tradition), vision of education, and the establishment of modern academies were trite even at the time; Lingdong Academy was one of numerous Western-inspired schools that appeared in late Qing China, and his views echoed Zhang Zhidong's and Kang Youwei's reading of Confucius as a reformer. And, like most

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<sup>98</sup> Xu and Huang, *Qiu Fengjia zhuan*, 194.

modern academies of its time, Lingdong Academy did not make a total break with the past; it offered syncretic, Sino-Western learning to stem the commercialization and Western influence emanating from the treaty ports. Practical realities also prevented Lingdong Academy from offering a wholly Japanese or Western curriculum. At the academy's inception, the civil service examinations remained in place, and some of its students, despite what Qiu Fengjia had envisioned, still expected to be prepared for the examinations so that they might become officials.<sup>99</sup> When Qiu Fengjia acted to reduce the Confucian curriculum, some students, their parents, and the more conservative gentry opposed him. For his erstwhile supporters, both classical learning and practical knowledge had to stay; they were not entirely comfortable with forsaking the prospect of a bureaucratic career. He was then forced to resign in favor of Wen Zhonghe 溫仲和 (1849–1904), a disciplinarian and famous Guangdong evidential scholar seeking to synthesize “scientific” research with moral and political concerns. In the winter of 1903, Qiu Fengjia left Lingdong Academy to establish more schools in Guangdong and the surrounding provinces.<sup>100</sup>

By arguing that men of talent did not need to serve in government and could indirectly contribute to the nation via a career in business, industry, or scholarship, Qiu Fengjia rejected the traditional Chinese view that education must lead to the civil service

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<sup>99</sup> Huang, “Jindai Chaoshan jiaoyu gailun,” 11.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 13.

examinations and then to officialdom. Ultimately, however, the choice for Qiu Fengjia was between what he viewed as good and bad education, not between China and the West. He used education and the idea of shared destiny to create a rapport with the overseas Chinese and receive their cooperation in constructing a stronger China that could withstand the imperialist onslaught and imminent partition. Qiu Fengjia thus imagined a proto-nation prior to the rise of a stronger China in the foreseeable future.

### *Education Politicized*

Of course, to a certain extent, education could never be entirely divorced from politics. As Bastid suggests, the people whose ideals triumphed in education would triumph in politics, and concepts of education were directly influenced by political leanings. Zhang Jian, for instance, did not ignore this logic and was motivated to establish modern academies that were independent of state control to fulfill his political aspirations.<sup>101</sup> Qiu Fengjia was somewhat different because he wanted to work with the imperial authorities—his founding of schools and fundraising trip to Southeast Asia were condoned if not endorsed by local officials, many of whom had been admirers of his poetry and heroic deeds back in Taiwan. Guangdong had the distinct advantage of being well connected to the outside world through historic trade routes and diasporic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and North

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<sup>101</sup> Bastid, *Educational Reform*, 12.

America. Qiu Fengjia was able to tap into such resources and develop his financial and social networks to realize his pedagogical vision.

However, his vision yielded unintended consequences. Within a few years of its inception, the Lingdong Academy became a hotbed for political activism. Students of the academy participated in the 1905 Chinese boycott of American goods after a string of anti-Chinese events in the United States. They submitted articles to Chinese patriotic societies and newspapers. Some of these students enrolled in the military academies that were founded during the last decade of Qing rule.<sup>102</sup> Synchronic with nationwide political developments, the promotion of schooling advanced the politicization of local societies. Overseas Chinese contributions to education were the main reason for the rise of modern academies in eastern Guangdong and elsewhere.<sup>103</sup> While Qiu Fengjia could not control the consequences, he managed to convince a mobile society of merchants, sojourners, and their left-behind families that their contributions mattered not only for themselves but also for a larger imagined unit that was the nation. By contributing to moderate causes such as Qiu Fengjia's or to radical ones led by Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen, the Nanyang Chinese, despite their differences in

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<sup>102</sup> Xu and Huang, *Qiu Fengjia*, 161–62.

<sup>103</sup> Gregor Benton and Hong Liu, *Dear China: Emigrant Letters and Remittances, 1820-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 137.



birthplace, class, and language, were politicized; politics and the idea of nationhood appeared within their reach.<sup>104</sup>

## Conclusion

Although Qiu Fengjia criticized the futility of the civil service examinations, he exhibited no qualms about serving the Qing government in a quasi-private capacity. He agreed to serve on the Guangdong Provincial Assembly (Guangdong ziyiju 廣東咨議局) and participated in the constitutional movement.<sup>105</sup> He also became the deputy speaker of the Guangdong Study Society for Local Self-Government (Guangdong difang zizhi yanjiuhui 廣東地方自治研究會) and helped to prepare literati for self-rule. In November 1911, when Guangdong governor Zhang Mingqi 張鳴岐 (1875–1945) called for the provincial assembly to determine if the province should remain in the Qing Empire or declare independence, Qiu Fengjia voted in favor of independence. He welcomed the dawn of the Xinhai Revolution and suggested that had the “Chinese nation” (*Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族) understood republican principles five centuries earlier, the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) might still have existed. Now that the “descendants of Emperors Yan and Huang” (*Yanhuang zisun* 炎黃子孫) had regained control of the “Central Plains” (China); a strong, self-assured China that would be

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<sup>104</sup> Ching-Hwang Yen, *The Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution: With Special Reference to Singapore and Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976), 286–90.

<sup>105</sup> Qiu, “Qiu Fengjia nianpu,” 202.

both traditional and modern, as well as both culturally unique and internationally respected, awaited them.<sup>106</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, as the Chinese nation (or its prototype) was taking shape, Qiu Fengjia tried to introduce the benefits of reformed government and involve the overseas Chinese—the rich, yes, but especially the poor—in the creation of a new nation. He focused on upholding the idea of China as a shared political, but especially a cultural, enterprise and was not interested in rejecting the politics of monarchical rule outright. Moreover, he believed in the central role of education in reforming China; education was hardly discussed in the publications of reformist and revolutionary elites. For Qiu Fengjia, education was an instrument of economic and social change rather than, as modern nationalists would suggest, an architect of whatever form the Qing (or non-Qing) state would take.<sup>107</sup> Qiu Fengjia argued that, as a cultural entity, China could only survive by merging the best of Chinese and Western ideas and institutions. The key to overcoming foreign imperialism and becoming a modern nation in the image of Japan was a people who were made intelligent by education, a cause to which the overseas Chinese could contribute for themselves, their kin, and the nation.

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<sup>106</sup> Qiu, *Qiu Fengjia wenji*, 237–38.

<sup>107</sup> Reynolds, *China, 1898–1912*, 53.

Qiu Fengjia worked hard to convey an imagined or future China to the overseas Chinese to inspire a sense of organic coherence between Guangdong and Taiwan in the people of Guangdong. Although he had not necessarily invoked his own experiences or emphasized Taiwan in his lectures—his reputation was that of a disgraced opportunist with no obvious principles before he acquired a more positive image as an educational theorist—he attempted to convert the provincial identity of the Guangdong people into a national identity. Although he had tried to convince the overseas Chinese to invest in his academies and think of themselves as a people with mutual obligations to one another, his aim was not so much to effect political change as to associate the fall of the Taiwan Republic with the apathy of the Guangdong people through education and poetry. His mission to the overseas Chinese was to raise funds to educate those back home in China to develop a stronger sense of nationhood and defend it through the use of intellect so that a similar event to the cession of Taiwan would not happen again.

Qiu Fengjia never forgot Taiwan; he named one of his sons Niantai 念臺, which literally means “remember Taiwan,” when Niantai came of age at fifteen in 1909. He even declared that the Chinese republican regime began with Taiwan and was manifested in the

Republic of China.<sup>108</sup> On his deathbed, he instructed that his final resting place face south, toward Taiwan.<sup>109</sup>

If through his poems he had immortalized Taiwan and himself, then through his educational activities he had helped the Taiwan Republic realize its unfulfilled goals. He understood that saving China from partition and foreign imperialism was a generations-long process of nurturing human talent in the nation's service. If Confucian scholarship had evolved to preach that it was possible for every man to become a sage without the mediation of scholars and classical texts, then education had returned to the fray to make every man fit to save the Chinese nation and his overseas compatriots.

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<sup>108</sup> Qiu Ruijia 丘瑞甲, "Xian xiong Canghai xingzhuang" 先兄滄海行狀 (The deeds of my late brother Qiu Fengjia). In *Qiu Fengjia ji* 丘逢甲集 (The complete writings of Qiu Fengjia) (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2001), 448.

<sup>109</sup> Jiang Quan 江璩, "Qiu Canghai zhuan" 丘滄海傳 (A biography of Qiu Fengjia), in *Qiu Fengjia Yizuo* 丘逢甲遺作 (Posthumous writings of Qiu Fengjia), by Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (Taipei: Shijie Henantang Qiushi wenxianshe, 1998), 457.

## Chapter Four: Ou Jujia and the Possibility of a Federated China

### Introduction

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) broke out in Qing China, devastating the south and significantly weakening the dynasty. On the advice of the Han Chinese governors-general who had helped suppress the rebellion, the Manchu monarchs implemented self-strengthening reforms to develop China's industrial base and to restore its military capabilities. The most powerful of these governors-general, Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872) and his protégé, Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), began establishing “private bureaucracies” (*mufu* 幕府) that bypassed the civil service examinations and inducted non-classically educated technical specialists into officialdom.<sup>1</sup>

Given the Qing court's traditional distrust of local officials—the rules of avoidance forbade them from serving in their ancestral or native places—and the local gentry, the devolution of imperial power to the provinces was unprecedented in the dynasty. It was also ominous; Chinese literati knew their histories well enough to interpret this development as a sign of dynastic collapse.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The private bureaucracies were staffed by experts in administration, diplomacy, transportation, or weaponry, which were fields of specialization beyond the purview of most Confucian scholars and Hanlin academicians. See Kenneth E. Folsom, *Friends, Guests, and Colleagues: The Mu-fu System in the Late Ch'ing Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); and Jonathan Porter, *Tseng Kuo-fan's Private Bureaucracy* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California Press, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> For the political motivations and administrative benefits and costs of maintaining the rules of avoidance, see R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644–1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 173–178. Local officials, who were unfamiliar with the provinces and counties that they were assigned to govern, often relied on clerks and runners, who enjoyed

Conservative Chinese literati and officials criticized the self-strengtheners, either for their own agenda or due to a different vision of reforming China.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, both traditional scholar-officials and professional technocratic officials emphasized resisting foreign imperialism. While scholar-officials advocated more gradual reforms inspired by historical precedents and the Confucian classics, technocratic bureaucrats under Li Hongzhang successfully convinced Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧 (1835–1908), the de facto ruler of China, to launch reformist, Western-inspired projects, such as modern diplomatic offices, maritime customs service, military arsenals, translators' colleges, and postal-telegraph networks.<sup>4</sup>

Wars with foreign powers soon became a litmus test for measuring the success of these reforms. If China's naval defeat in the Sino-French War (1884–1885) reduced the optimism of the reforms, its defeat by Japan—traditionally viewed as an inferior power by Chinese literati—in the Sino-Japanese War ten years later (1894–1895) dealt a fatal blow to

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the very local ties and loyalties that the avoidance rule was designed to overcome. See Bradly W. Reed, *Talons and Teeth: County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Many of these officials formed the amorphous *Qingyi* 清議 (Pure Discussion) clique, which sought to recentralize imperial power in favor of less Western-inspired reforms and a more assertive foreign policy. See Lloyd E. Eastman, "Ch'ing-i and Chinese Policy Formation during the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Asian Studies* 24, no. 4 (1965): 596–611; Lloyd E. Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy during the Sino-French Controversy, 1880–1885* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); and also Mary Backus Rankin, "Public Opinion and Political Power: *Qingyi* in Late Nineteenth Century China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (1982): 453–484.

<sup>4</sup> Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Stephen R. Halsey, *Quest for Power: European Imperialism and the Making of Chinese Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

the reforms and their advocates.<sup>5</sup> The Sino-Japanese War signaled the shortcomings of the self-strengthening movement, the greatest of which was that it lacked the thorough changes in ideas and institutions needed to coordinate manpower and resources against foreign imperialism.<sup>6</sup>

The entry of Japan as an imperialist power in East Asia destabilized the delicate balance of power that had been maintained among the Western powers in China, and it triggered a new vicious scramble for concessions in the Qing domain. By forcing the Qing court to recognize Korea as an independent nation and by annexing Taiwan, Japan destroyed the last façade of the Chinese tributary system. By being granted the privilege to build industrial factories in China (foreign factories had hitherto been illegal in China), Japan exposed Qing China to foreign economic imperialism, with the Western powers invoking the most-favored-nation clause to receive the same right to open factories in China. The cession of the Liaodong 遼東 peninsula to Japan, repealed by the “Triple Intervention” of France, Germany, and Russia, led to cessions or territorial leases elsewhere: Jiaozhou 交州 (in Shandong 山東 Province) to Germany; Port Arthur 亞瑟港 and Dalian 大連 (in

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<sup>5</sup> For the relationship between war, support for the Manchu regime, and twentieth-century Chinese historiographies, see Benjamin A. Elman, “Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China’s Self-Strengthening Reforms into Scientific and Technological Failure, 1865–1895,” *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2004): 283–326.

<sup>6</sup> For the implications of the Sino-Japanese War, see S.C.M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For the scramble for concessions in China, see Robert A. Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832–1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

Liaodong) to Russia; Weihaiwei 威海衛 (in Shandong) and New Territories 新界 (in Guangdong Province) to Britain; and Guangzhouwan 廣州灣 (also in Guangdong) to France. By 1900, China had been divided among the powers into spheres of influence. Within these spheres, the appropriate power would have priority over economic activities, and the Qing court could not cede parts of that jurisdiction to other foreign powers. Qing territorial sovereignty was thus thoroughly violated and transparently a myth, prompting Chinese literati to consider more drastic reforms.<sup>7</sup>

### *Politicized Literati*

The intuitive sense that the Chinese nation was “natural” and objectively real, as well as a widely shared sense of despair that the Qing state was endangered beyond salvation, had permeated both literati and non-literati by the turn of the twentieth century, especially after the shock of defeat in 1895.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the self-strengthening movement led by provincial governors and technocratic officials, the post-1895 political and social innovations, such as study societies that discussed the applicability of foreign ideas to empowering China,

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<sup>7</sup> This paragraph draws from William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 233–236.

<sup>8</sup> Nationalism was not merely brought in from the West. A feeling of “nationalism” or “national consciousness” had emerged among the educated Chinese of the Song dynasty (960–1279), who viewed themselves as living in a “China among equals” surrounded by militarily powerful but culturally unsophisticated states. See Nicolas Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 5–7; Morris Rossabi, ed., *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).



originated with the local gentry and were promoted by literate communities in the counties and villages.

Natives of Guangdong, who had benefited from centuries of riverine exchanges of information and trade, were particularly active in this reform movement. Like the local elites in other provinces, the Guangdong gentry had gained organizational experience and political insights working for/with provincial bureaucrats in previous decades. Members of the Guangdong gentry had demonstrated their ability to govern themselves and their constituents on behalf of the state and speculated whether they could conduct nationwide and even international affairs more effectively than the incompetent Qing court.<sup>9</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese literati were beginning to imagine a non-monarchical state composed of citizens and without claims to universal rule.<sup>10</sup> The “political modernity” of late Qing China was characterized by even newer capacities for contemplation and self-criticism introduced by the West and sometimes mediated by Japan. The Confucian myth of cosmological kingship—that the relationship between the ruler and the ruled corresponded with natural phenomena—was intensely scrutinized, as foreign political and scientific ideas altered the existential, metaphysical, and moral orientations of Chinese

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<sup>9</sup> Rowe, *China's Last Empire*, 252. For the gradual development of Guangdong into an educational and trading center, see Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning: Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006); and *Upriver Journeys: Diaspora and Empire in Southern China, 1570–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885–1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 5.

literati. Classically educated scholars faced a cultural crisis and sought a new orientational order that could contextualize foreign ideas as they entered Chinese conditions and could reconfigure their relationship with the Chinese state.<sup>11</sup>

Guangdong literati's reinterpretations of Confucian texts through the lens of Western ideas and their search for radical ways to reform China culminated in the Hundred Days' Reform (1898). The Guangxu 光緒 emperor (r. 1875–1908), advised by Guangdong scholar Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), planned to desacralize the Qing state, create a constitutional monarchy, and transfer sovereignty to the people. With the help of Cixi, proponents of gradual changes and those with vested interests in existing patronage networks launched a coup. The suppression of the Hundred Days' Reform resulted in the house arrest of Guangxu; Kang and his disciples fled in exile and became known as the royalists (Baohuangdang 保皇黨). Through newspapers and pamphlets in Japan and elsewhere, the royalists publicized their support of a constitutional monarchy.<sup>12</sup>

The royalists operated mainly in Japan, North America, and Southeast Asia, where many Chinese sojourned or settled. At around the same time, the revolutionaries, who

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<sup>11</sup> Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning (1890–1911)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1–20.

<sup>12</sup> In 1899, Kang Youwei founded the Society to Protect the Emperor (Baohuanghui 保皇會), which was dedicated to reinstating Guangxu as China's rightful ruler. For Kang Youwei's political ideas and their implications for China, see Zarrow, *After Empire*, 24–55. For some historians, the role played by Kang Youwei in the Hundred Days' Reform, which derived ideas from other scholars and would not have begun without the complicity of high-ranking ministers such as Weng Tonghe 翁同龢 (1830–1904), who had served as Guangxu's chief tutor, has been exaggerated. For a discussion of the main protagonists of the reform, see Luke S.K. Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days: Personalities, Politics, and Ideas of 1898* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984).

unequivocally associated national survival with the overthrow of the Qing dynasty, were organizing themselves, first under the Tongmenghui 同盟會 and then under the Kuomintang 國民黨. Also known as the Nationalists, they established branches in cities populated by overseas Chinese and competed with the royalists for support.

Until recent years, the writings of late Qing royalists and revolutionaries, who highlighted the shortcomings of the Qing state by contrasting it with the West, have led to unflattering if not wholly negative assessments of the dynasty. Because both the royalists and the revolutionaries derived most of their ideas from Japan and the West and both groups were operating in Western nations, allegedly Westernized nations (most notably Japan), and Western colonies, the binaries of conservatism–liberalism and East–West in Chinese historiography were created.<sup>13</sup>

But the predominant focus on the China–Japan–West triangle as a model of political developments in China, as Rebecca E. Karl suggests, obscures the complex, multiple sources of inspiration that the Chinese literati had at their disposal in reconceptualizing their relationship with the state and with one another. Karl and Xiaobing Tang demonstrate that the Chinese reformers and revolutionaries were truly aware of global discourses and events and formulated a “global space” where the human condition was regarded as universal and the

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Ravina has cautioned against exaggerating the foreignness, radicalism, and Westernization of Japan—or just of any nation—during the globally transformative era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Ravina, *To Stand with the Nations of the World: Japan's Meiji Restoration in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

destinies of the world's peoples were intertwined. As Tang argues, Kang Youwei's chief disciple, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), was committed to a “global imaginary of identity” and had invoked it to “justify a democratic assertion of political equivalence and universality” in the first years of the twentieth century—a more complex picture than what binary thinking has revealed.<sup>14</sup>

### *Key Arguments*

This chapter examines *New Guangdong (Xin Guangdong 新廣東)*, a 1901–1902 exhortation for Guangdong's independence from the Qing, by Ou Jujia 歐榘甲 (1870–1912), a disciple of Kang Youwei, albeit less famous than Liang Qichao. Almost all the literati mentioned in this chapter were from Guangdong, but the factional and scholarly divides within the Guangdong literati who argued for political change were broad. Although Ou Jujia and other Guangdong literati shared the ambition to transform China and together drew from global intellectual currents, they did not agree on the method or speed of reform, and only Ou Jujia had advocated Guangdong's independence from the Chinese polity.

This chapter situates Ou Jujia's treatise within late Qing debates of national unity and disintegration in which Guangdong literati actively participated. Ou Jujia could be categorized as a “cultural amphibian” who was receptive to both Chinese and Western

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<sup>14</sup> See Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); and Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), and see p. 7.

cultures,<sup>15</sup> but this chapter is far less focused on binaries than on the global origins of his provincialism, which had been inspired by concepts, developments, and observations outside of China. Ou Jujia had not challenged Western ideologies, nor had he vehemently defended the Confucian ideas with which he had been brought up. Rather, his overseas travels offered him direct experiences with the effects of Western imperialism on Chinese settlers (most of whom were from Guangdong), forcing him to confront and to respond to the global issues similarly faced by his province. This chapter thus examines the impact of global awareness on a Chinese literatus's provincial consciousness and his engagement with the empire and imperialism. It presents an interpretation of *New Guangdong* sensitive to the significance of global events and trends observed by Ou Jujia and to his networks of ideas, which were inflected once subject to Chinese conditions.

Although Ou Jujia's provincial consciousness emerged as part of his national identity as a Han Chinese, this chapter does not suggest that Guangdong had an intrinsic nationhood, nor does it assume that Guangdong was an "imagined" nation. While Ou Jujia was aware of the territorial extent of his ideal Guangdong homeland and which groups it might include, he had not used terms such as *guo* 國 (state) or *guojia* 國家 (the compound for "state," sometimes referred to as "nation") to describe Guangdong, although centuries of environmental history and political contingencies had created a sense of cohesiveness in

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<sup>15</sup> See Chunmei Du, "Gu Hongming as a Cultural Amphibian: A Confucian Universalist Critique of Modern Western Civilization," *Journal of World History* 22, no. 4 (2011): 715–746.

Guangdong, which is separated from the rest of China by the Lingnan Mountains and had assumed the rough borders of ancient kingdoms such as Nanyue and Southern Han.<sup>16</sup>

Ou Jujia became part of a new generation of literati who moved away from purely nationalist agendas to more parochial concerns, although the ultimate goal of his vision of provincial secession was national regeneration.<sup>17</sup> For him, Guangdong was unquestionably part of China, but the province should declare independence from the Qing and then reunite with other provinces as a new China. Convinced that Guangdong's temporary independence was viable due to its geographical location and maritime connections, and inspired by the similarities between the province and Britain, he adopted a global outlook; however, at the same time, he advocated a form of Guangdong exceptionalism and prioritized provincial needs over national demands. Ou Jujia's introspective—if not parochial—views challenged the common assumption that globalism would necessarily imbue people with more universal goals, such as modernity and nation building. The major theme of *New Guangdong* was secession, or rather, how Guangdong could avoid the fate of being “carved up like a melon” by seceding from the Qing, whose partition appeared imminent.

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<sup>16</sup> Kevin Carrico, “Recentering China: The Cantonese in and beyond the Han,” in *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China's Majority*, edited by Thomas S. Mullaney, James Leibold, Stephanie Gros, and Eric Vanden Bussche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 23–44.

<sup>17</sup> This observation is partly inspired by Joya Chatterji's work on the shift in Hindu attitudes toward the partition of Bengal in *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

One of Ou Jujia's major innovations was to consider and to elucidate federalism as a method of governance for the vast Chinese nation. His attempts to initiate an independence movement and to promote federalist ideas alienated him from the reformers and—albeit to a far lesser extent—the revolutionaries, who both emphasized preserving the unity of China. Certainly, he was not the first Chinese literatus to discuss federalism. As early as 1895, Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙 (1866–1925) had suggested that federalism might replace the monarchical system in ruling China. Sun proposed that a local self-government be established in every province with administrative, executive, and judicial powers beyond the control of the central government. Viewing both democracy and local self-governance not as independent values but as preconditions for his aim of national integration, he prioritized democratization over decentralization.

However, over the years, Sun Yat-sen became skeptical of the uses of federalism by provincial leaders, who might secede from any centralized authority—not just the Qing—and justify secession with federalist pretensions. Like Sun, Ou Jujia was anti-Manchu, which was then a key signifier of Chinese nationalism.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Sun, Ou Jujia remained a strong supporter of Guangdong's independence from the Qing and did not indicate whether a

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<sup>18</sup> For federalism in modern China, see Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 177–204; and Steven Phillips, “The Demonization of Federalism in Republican China,” in *Defunct Federalisms: Critical Perspectives on Federal Failure*, eds. Emilian Kavalski and Magdalena Zolkos (London: Ashgate, 2008), 87–102.

democratically elected president (the American style preferred by Sun) or a constitutional monarch should be at the helm of a federated China.

By comparison, Ou Jujia shared similar ideas with literatus Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1868–1936). Zhang Binglin believed that centralized rule was not suitable for periods of crisis and foreign threats and called for a restoration of provincial autonomy that was enforced by the Zhou-dynasty military feudalism (*fengjian* 封建) and Tang-dynasty frontier fort (*fanzhen* 藩鎮) systems, and he imagined that provincial leaders would willingly surrender their power to the state after the crisis was averted.<sup>19</sup> Yet, unlike Zhang, Ou Jujia “had no faith in China’s historic institutions.”<sup>20</sup> He had not invoked or invented traditions for his advocacy and had embedded his ideas regarding provincial independence in his assessments of the local and global developments of his time.

### *Chapter Outline*

This chapter is comprised of three main sections. The first section describes the networks of ideas and practices that Ou Jujia could have accessed in Guangdong. The next section directly connects Ou Jujia’s life and travels to passages or sections of *New Guangdong*, which is analyzed as a significant engagement with federalism, empire, and

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<sup>19</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 180.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Zarrow, “The Reform Movement, The Monarchy, and Political Modernity,” in *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*, edited by Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), 43.



imperialism. The final section discusses the impact of *New Guangdong* on late Qing reformers and revolutionaries and the ways in which the text inspired similar independence movements in other provinces.

## **The Networks and Inflections of Federalist Ideas**

### *First Encounters*

Guangzhou, the provincial seat of Guangdong, had been a treaty port since the First Opium War (1839–1842). Many Western missionaries entered China through Guangzhou and printed journals, newspapers, and periodicals to successfully impress educated Chinese with their cultural, political, and scientific achievements.<sup>21</sup> They aimed to justify their presence, reduce Sino-foreign hostilities, and encourage productive Chinese exchanges with the foreign “barbarians.” For them, novelties such as American federalism served not so much to assert a sense of superiority as to pique Chinese curiosity. The innovation of the American political system was not lost on British missionaries, who devoted considerable effort to explaining concepts such as “zongli” 總理 (president) and “yihui” 議會 (parliament) in their periodicals.<sup>22</sup> The American missionaries, more comprehensive in their treatment of the

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<sup>21</sup> Michael C. Lazich, “Placing China in Its ‘Proper Rank among the Nations’: The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China and the First Systematic Account of the United States in Chinese,” *Journal of World History* 22, no. 3 (2011): 527–551. Barred from proselytizing in China prior to the First Opium War, Western missionaries turned to printing Chinese and foreign-language periodicals in the port colonies of Batavia (Jakarta), Macao, and the British Straits Settlements (Malacca, Penang, and Singapore). See Murray A. Rubinstein, *The Origins of the Anglo-American Missionary Enterprise in China, 1807–1840* (Lanham, MD and London: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 2; and Xiong Yuezhi, “Difficulties in Comprehension and Differences in Expression: Interpreting American Democracy in the Late Qing,” *Late Imperial China* 23, no. 1 (2002): 6.

<sup>22</sup> “Zongli” now refers to the prime minister.

United States, clarified the relationship between state and federal governments in America.

They stressed the limitations of their federal government—the president must pledge to conform to the law and to govern the people selflessly. This representation contrasted with the Chinese emperor, who could act above the law.<sup>23</sup>

By seeking equivalent terms in American and Chinese contexts, Western missionaries had rendered political concepts, such as “tongling” 統領 (another term for president), “gongtang” 公堂 (state-house), and “dufu” 督撫 (governor),<sup>24</sup> intelligible to educated Chinese. The United States became known as a “hezhongguo” 合省國 (federal nation) comprised of semi-independent “sheng” 省 (province or federal state) with clear divisions of power between individual states and the federal government.<sup>25</sup> These terms were reproduced in writing and rendered meaningful in the Chinese context by the scholars Liang Tingnan 梁廷柅 (1796–1861) and Xu Jiyu 徐繼畲 (1795–1873). Impressed that the American president practiced “shanrang” 禪讓 (non-hereditary succession), which was lost in the Chinese imperial tradition, Liang Tingnan proposed that the Chinese adopt some of America’s practices to avoid the upheavals of dynastic change. For Xu Jiyu, who had

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<sup>23</sup> Lazich, “Place China in Its ‘Proper Rank,’” 545. Under Elijah Coleman Bridgman (1801–1861), the first American Protestant Christian missionary appointed to China, American missionaries, assisted by their Chinese collaborators, wrote and circulated a book on the United States entitled *Meilige heshengguo zhilue* 美理哥合省國志略 (A Brief Account of the United States of America).

<sup>24</sup> In Qing-dynasty writings, “governor” was also translated as *zongdu* 總督 or *zhouzhang* 首長.

<sup>25</sup> “Bang” 幫, “xian” 縣, and “zhou” 州 had been used on various occasions to denote the American state. For a list of Chinese names for American concepts and for the “United States of America” during the Qing period, see Yang Yusheng 楊玉聖, *Zhongguo ren de Meiguo guan: yi ge lishi de kaocha* 中國人的美國觀: 一個歷史的考察 (Chinese Views of America: An Assessment) (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1996), 1–2.

arranged for the opening of Xiamen 廈門 (Amoy) as a treaty port, the United States was an anti-imperialist model to resist British colonial power. Fascinated by the cooperation between national leaders and the local gentry in America, he accepted China's organizational weakness and sought solutions from foreign models.<sup>26</sup>

### *First Impressions*

The examples of Liang Tingnan and Xu Jiyu reveal that after the Opium War and the diffusion of knowledge by missionaries, some Chinese literati had begun to regard Western states as successful polities that China could emulate for its own improvement. Xu Jiyu's writings were reprinted by the Zongli Yamen 總理衙門, a specialized office to manage foreigners inside China, in 1866, and self-strengthening officials often referred to them for inspiration. Zeng Guofan consulted Xu Jiyu's books and admired the American model, which promised to develop state power by enhancing local initiative.<sup>27</sup>

Following the creation of the treaty ports, which facilitated the exchange of goods and people, Chinese literati and Western missionaries created a network of ideas that served to inspire changes in governing practices in China. A sense of curiosity rather than shame prompted Chinese bureaucrats and writers on the southern coast and in Guangdong to

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<sup>26</sup> Liang Tingnan, *Heshengguo shuo* 合省國說 (A Treatise on the United States of America) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993). For an examination of Xu Jiyu's views, see Fred W. Drake, *China Charts the World: Hsu Chi-yu and His Geography of 1848* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>27</sup> Drake, *China Charts the World*, passim.

evaluate the merits of Western models. These writers, who engaged in extensive dealings with foreign diplomats and merchants, were most intrigued by the Americans, who had overthrown British colonial rule and had established a powerful nation. They highlighted characteristics of the American experiments with popular sovereignty and the presidential system that the Chinese could consider in improving their political tradition. They believed that legal provisions could ensure a peaceful transition of power similar to that of the United States—China might also be able to benefit from an altruistic, equitable distribution of power among the state, the local government, and the people.

Therefore, increasingly exposed to sophisticated modes of government from abroad through the circulation of missionary texts, Chinese literati compared political systems, understood foreign models through cultural translation, and based their interpretations on Chinese conditions.

Merely curious about the innovations of a people that had defeated Britain (China's chief adversary in the 1840s–1850s), Chinese literati had yet to definitively associate American power with American political institutions. Because there was more interest in the local workings of American federalism that forbade undue central intervention, it was not imperative to overhaul the imperial system due to political exigencies. While they offered the repertoire of terms and political vocabulary that subsequent literati could adopt to articulate

federalist ideas and local consciousness, they had yet to identify the Chinese equivalent of the American state—the province—and its political roles in China.

## **Guangdong for the Guangdong People**

### *Provinces and Identities*

Provinces, which are distinct political-administrative units in China, can be traced back to the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).<sup>28</sup> An early generation of scholars debated the relationship between national and provincial identities in China. As Prasenjit Duara summarizes, some viewed provincial identity as an obstacle to nationalism; for others, it was “a vehicle for nationalism [which] enabled the transition from a parochial to a wider identification with the nation.”<sup>29</sup> Recent reassessments have moved away from the modernization theory of the 1960s and 1970s, which assumed a linear transition from tradition to nationalism. R. Kent Guy argues that provincial identities strengthened under Qing governors: “the Qing appointments procedure, which allowed the central government considerable flexibility in its choice of personnel, also facilitated the establishment of regional identities.” He elaborates that “appointees chosen for one set of skills reinforced the association between those skills and the offices they held until the postings in south and

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<sup>28</sup> See Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 72.

<sup>29</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 178.

central China came to acquire their own character.”<sup>30</sup> As John Fitzgerald rightly suggests, “once a territorial unit of government has been created at any level, it generates interactions among and between parts of the political system and elements of the social, cultural, and economic environment.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, territorial divisions create and consolidate local identities over time.

While Guangdong’s political identity had been shaped by Qing administrative boundaries and imperatives, the formation of its cultural identity was less straightforward. People in different parts of Guangdong spoke different languages, including Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, and their variants. They also belonged to different ethnicities, although Han Chinese comprised the majority in most regions. Nevertheless, by the late nineteenth century, the Guangdong people could be characterized by their shared experience of engaging with the outside world. As Guangzhou’s monopoly of trade eroded with the opening of other treaty ports after the Opium Wars, Guangdong merchants began to contact trading partners in Hong Kong, Siam, Shanghai, and the Western colonies of Southeast Asia. Their children traveled to Europe, Japan, and North America for further studies or to train as diplomats as the Qing began establishing formal, regular ties with other states. Impoverished people of the hinterland sailed to Australia, North America, and Southeast Asia to work as laborers to help

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<sup>30</sup> Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces*, 289.

<sup>31</sup> John Fitzgerald, “The Province in History,” in *Rethinking China’s Provinces*, ed. John Fitzgerald (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 13.

establish new Western colonies. Kinship, letters, and remittances preserved their families, as Madeline Y. Hsu demonstrates through her study of immigrants from Taishan 臺山, a coastal county in Guangdong, to the United States. Taishan was a microcosm of Guangdong, and its people established a “transnational community” linked to global systems of capital, labor, and race through the experience and infrastructure of migration.<sup>32</sup>

As late Qing China faced a real threat of being dismembered by predatory foreign powers, Chinese literati and provincial leaders, as Duara observes, sought to organize the province as “a political community by mobilizing its traditions and hardening its cultural boundaries in response to the political forces of the late nineteenth century”<sup>33</sup>; however, as Marc Andre Matten suggests, the actual power that the fear of partition had produced among political leaders and the majority of the people has remained inadequately explained, despite the insight that nationalism is little more than an ideological construct.<sup>34</sup> While the ideology of nationalism became the literati’s cure for the Qing inability to resist foreign pressure, the idea that a unified Chinese nation-state should inherit the Qing imperial borders took much longer to develop.

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<sup>32</sup> Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). See also Cheng Meibao 程美寶, *Diyu wenhua yu guojia rentong: wan Qing yi lai “Guangdong wenhua” guan de xingcheng* 地域文化與國家認同：晚清以來“廣東文化”觀的形成 (Regional Culture and National Identity: The Shaping of “Guangdong Culture” Since the Late Qing) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2006), 34–35.

<sup>33</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 178.

<sup>34</sup> Marc Andre Matten, *Imagining a Postnational World: Hegemony and Space in Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 7.

After defining “China” and “Chinese” to fulfill the criteria of forming a nation-state, literati and political leaders had to modernize to Western expectations and fight for non-interference and national sovereignty. In doing so, they shared a “global ethic that was inflected by a civilizational geographic imaginary,” which imbued in Chinese literati the idea that an unquestionable hierarchy of nations granted privileges and rights to Western nations; China had to reform—radically if it must—to be treated as an equal. The Chinese notion of a “universal West” worthy of emulation helps explain why no systematic anti-Japanism or anti-Westernism existed until the 1920s, when imperialism and unequal treaties became conflated with nation, race, and religion. Late Qing Chinese literati accepted the normativity of Western civilization and decoupled progress from any association with culture, race, religion, or geography. They had almost no qualms about seeking inspiration from Japan or the West, which from the hindsight perspective of nationalistic historiography, had repeatedly humiliated China.<sup>35</sup> One of Ou Jujia’s innovations was that if the Qing had failed to match Western standards of a modern nation that warranted respect and equal treatment, then

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 11–12. The success of Japanese reforms since the 1868 Meiji Restoration inspired the Chinese because it showed that progress could be achieved within a few decades by “cultivating patriotism, dedication to the nation, and social mobility.” Japan’s success, and its acceptance by major nations as an equal power, triggered the scramble for China among Western powers, which feared that China might eventually reform quickly to become a version of Japan. See Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 71–92, and see p. 81. The anti-Western event of the Boxer Rebellion was, as Joseph Esherick has illuminated, somewhat disorganized and spontaneous. See Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). For the “true” rise of modernity and nationalism in the 1919 May Fourth Movement, see Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China’s Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).



Chinese provinces deserved the contingency of secession to make their own transition to modernity.

### *The Birth of New Guangdong*

Born and raised in Guangdong Province, Ou Jujia was reportedly first introduced to anti-Manchu ideas by his grandfather, who befriended the Taiping generals who had fled Qing prosecution to Guangdong. His landowning father had groomed him for the civil service examinations; however, perhaps due to the declining usefulness of a classical education, Ou Jujia was eventually sent to a local modern academy where he studied under Deng Chengxiu 鄧承修 (1841–1892), a fellow native of Danshui township and a censor who famously petitioned the emperor to impeach Li Hongzhang for concluding the Treaty of Hue after the Sino-French War and surrendering the Qing suzerainty of Vietnam to France. The aged Deng, who admired Kang Youwei's teacher, Zhu Ciqi 朱次琦 (1807–1881), subsequently sent Ou Jujia to study under Kang.<sup>36</sup>

It was Kang Youwei, who emphasized statecraft learning and who had read translations of Western books, who provided Ou Jujia with his knowledge of the world beyond China.<sup>37</sup> Ou Jujia had helped run the School of Current Affairs (*Shiwu xuetang* 時務

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<sup>36</sup> Li Shaoling 李少陵, "Ou Jujia xiansheng zhuan" 歐榘甲先生傳 (A Biography of Ou Jujia), in *Ou Jujia xiansheng zhuan*, ed. Li Shaoling (Taipei: Daye shudian, 1960), 4–8.

<sup>37</sup> For the origins of Kang Youwei's thought, see Benjamin A. Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

學堂) in Hunan 湖南 Province, where he interacted with Hunan literati, such as Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1864–1898) and Tang Caichang 唐才常 (1867–1900), who later played prominent roles in revolutionary activities.<sup>38</sup> Ou Jujia was involved in the Hundred Days' Reform and helped draft proposals and issue edicts in support of the reforms.

The Hundred Days' Reform was the beginning of what Peter Zarrow refers to as a period of “Confucian radicalism.”<sup>39</sup> Ou Jujia traveled to Yokohama, where Liang Qichao had founded *The China Discussion Paper* (*Qingyi bao* 清議報), which spread democratic ideals and revolutionary ideas among Chinese students in Japan. In his articles to *The China Discussion Paper*, Ou Jujia urges his readers to resist Manchu oppression. He even suggested that revolution was the most effective approach to saving China and reintroducing order and peace to a new Chinese nation.<sup>40</sup> After a short stint in Macau, at the invitation of reformers in North America, Ou Jujia left for San Francisco, where he edited a Chinese-language, anti-Manchu newspaper and witnessed the deplorable living conditions of Guangdong laborers. *New Guangdong* first appeared as a series of articles in San Francisco and was reprinted by Liang Qichao as a pamphlet in Yokohama.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Li, “Ou Jujia xiansheng zhuan,” 14–15. See also Stephen R. Platt, *Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895–1949* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 15–19.

<sup>40</sup> Ou Jujia, “Zhongguo lidai geming shuolue” 中國歷代革命說略 (A Brief Discussion of Revolutions in Chinese History), *Qingyi bao* 31 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 1989–1991. For Ou Jujia's involvement with *Qingyi bao*, see Feng Ziyou 馮自由, *Geming yishi* 革命逸史 (Reminiscences of the Revolution), Vol. 1 (Taipei: Shangwu, 1953), 63–64.

<sup>41</sup> Li, “Ou Jujia xiansheng zhuan,” 20–22.

As a native of Guangdong, Ou Jujia felt obliged to write *New Guangdong* and to advocate the independence of his province from the Qing. He anchored his advocacy in narratives of human nature. For him, provincial identity was a prerequisite for nationalism because it was the basic unit of love. A “patriot” (*aiguo zhe* 愛國者), Ou suggested, would have greater love for his home and province than for his nation. Provincial leaders should thus aim for provincial independence above national liberation from the Qing. The first provinces to achieve independence would serve as role models for other provinces, whose leaders would work to attain the same status for their own provinces due to provincial pride. As provinces would become independent one after another, the Qing would simply disintegrate. After overthrowing the dynasty, the secessionist provinces would establish a federal nation (*hezhongguo* 合眾國).

For this strategy to be successful, the Chinese would be required to concentrate their limited resources on fighting for their own province’s independence. The success of one province breaking free of Qing rule would breed optimism and inspire other provinces. The Chinese would then regard the breakaway province as “China” and would no longer recognize the Qing as their nation. They would seek independence for their province to merge with this “China” and other provinces to form a new Chinese nation on the ruins of the Qing.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ou Jujia, “Xin Guangdong” 新廣東 (New Guangdong), in *Ou Jujia xiansheng zhuan*, ed. Li Shaoling (Taipei: Daye shudian, 1960), 45.

### *The Promise of Guangdong*

Ou Jujia discussed empire and imperialism in *New Guangdong*. For the foreign powers that had witnessed how enfeebled China had become after the Sino-Japanese War and that were scrambling for Chinese territory, he wrote that Guangdong was the most coveted province, being a large territory endowed with fertile land, natural resources, and rich produce as well as being easily defensible because it is surrounded by mountains and seas. He observes that Guangdong was the first province to be opened to trade and that it had become the most cosmopolitan province. Therefore, it did not lack knowledgeable, talented people well-versed in both foreign and local affairs.

This characteristic explains why the Guangdong people had been at the forefront of the reform movements aimed at strengthening China against foreign aggression. They engaged in coal mining, foreign trade, and arsenal building and established academies, newspapers, and study societies. Most of the overseas Chinese who discussed foreign affairs, published newspapers, and learned in colleges were natives of Guangdong. Millions of Guangdong people abroad constituted another “China” and served as a counterweight to foreign imperialism.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 46.

Ou Jujia considered Guangdong the wealthiest province in China. According to him, since the mid-nineteenth century, when the Qing government was faced with a war or a natural disaster, Guangdong had contributed more resources than other provinces to help resolve the crisis. Guangdong also made the largest contribution to Qing revenue by paying the heaviest taxes. Rather than squandering its wealth on the corrupt and nepotistic officials of the Qing, it was more beneficial for Guangdong to spend revenue generated from overseas trade, which was greater than that of the smallest countries of Europe, on developing its capacity for self-rule.

Guangdong was also ideally situated to host a regional capital. Ou Jujia appeared to have a geographical definition of China when he suggested that China should have five capitals—in Beijing (north) and in four geo-strategically positioned provinces: Jiangsu 江蘇 (east), Sichuan 四川 (west), Wuchang 武昌 (center), and Guangdong (south). As the province where the southern capital should be located, Guangdong alone had the “essence of independence” (*duli xingzhi* 獨立性質). Separated from the rest of China by the Pearl River and the Lingnan Mountains, it had a unique culture and language (i.e., Cantonese). Foreign goods and ideas passed through Guangdong before circulating in China. Having colonized the lands and islands of the South China Sea and elsewhere, the Guangdong people had

generated immense wealth for the province, and this wealth made it as populous as the countries of Europe and North America.<sup>44</sup>

### *The Issue of Ethnicity*

Guangdong's qualities were promising, Ou Jujia wrote, because they defined what it meant to be a strong and prosperous nation according to Western standards. The Guangdong people must have recognized that their province was under the threat of Western colonization because the enervated Qing court would have no qualms about conceding it to foreign control. Speaking from a nativist perspective, Ou Jujia urged the Guangdong people, whose families had made Guangdong their home for many generations, to assume responsibility for their own lives and property. He cautioned that the Qing court was dominated by the Manchus, who were culturally and ethnically different from the Han Chinese. The Manchus had massacred the Guangdong people in their conquest of Ming China and had taken Guangdong by force. Now that they could no longer effectively defend Guangdong and had even collaborated with foreign powers to the detriment of the Guangdong people, it was appropriate that the Han Chinese retake Guangdong from them.<sup>45</sup>

Ou Jujia articulated a Han Chinese race—constituted by peril and intervention—and set it in opposition to the Manchus. For him, the threat to the Han Chinese in Guangdong was

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 47–48.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 48–49.

historical, set within the broader history of the Han-Manchu conflict. His formulation attested that China's 1911–1912 revolution was as much anti-imperialist as it was anti-Manchu.<sup>46</sup>

The Manchus, he suggested, had discriminated against the Han Chinese since their conquest of Ming China. The “benevolence” of the early Manchu emperors was simply a political strategy to win over their Han Chinese subjects and to diminish their will to recover their nation. Since the First Opium War, the Manchus had revealed their true intentions by ceding territories to imperialistic powers without any regard for the people living in them. The Qing court's blatant disregard for the feelings of people in colonial or occupied territories illustrated that for the Manchus, the Han Chinese were dispensable slaves and servants who could have no say over their lives or homes. The Han Chinese thus owed the Manchus no moral or political obligations.<sup>47</sup>

What if the Guangdong people decided that they could reclaim the right to rule themselves but were then accused by the Qing court of treason? For Ou Jujia, such an accusation was absurd because it was the Qing court that had failed the Guangdong people. If the Qing government could not protect the people of Guangdong and abandoned them, then it would have breached the social contract with them and should instead be accused of treason.

Deploying familiar Confucian terms, he suggested that the Guangdong people had not defied

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<sup>46</sup> Edward J.M. Rhoads, *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861–1928* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Ou, “Xin Guangdong,” 49.

the principles of righteousness (*yi* 義) or reason (*li* 理) in discarding Qing rule. For him, the Guangdong people were simply acting in self-defense—the Manchus could not even fend for themselves, having to surrender control of their homeland in northeastern China to the Japanese and Russians. The Manchus had denied the Han Chinese their equality and freedom—the Enlightenment values of the universal West—and impeded Guangdong's progress to modernity.<sup>48</sup> He posited the recovery of provincial agency as a symbol of the regeneration of the Han Chinese race, reflecting the late Qing discourses of race and social Darwinism that created a distinct Chinese racial consciousness.<sup>49</sup>

### *Another India*

Guangdong could not afford to lose more territory, Ou Jujia argued. Guangdong had lost more territory to foreign powers than any other province. It had relinquished Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhouwan, Xin'an 新安, and Xiangshan 香山, whose people were caught by surprise when they heard that they would become Western colonies. Ou Jujia predicted that Hainan 海南 Island would be next unless the Guangdong people united to prevent that scenario and to prepare for independence from the Qing. The Guangdong people could learn from the inspiring Boers and the Cubans, who managed to defeat numerically and technologically superior forces to become their own masters. In their respective corners of the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 49–50.

<sup>49</sup> Frank Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). For Ou Jujia's reference to social Darwinism, see Ou, "Xin Guangdong," 58–59.



world, they had everything to lose and still vehemently resisted the imperialistic designs of great powers, which, in contrast, had little to lose if subjugated peoples achieved independence. Closer to home, the Guangdong people could learn from the militiamen of Guangzhouwan, Xin'an, and Taiwan, who had organized themselves and had resisted the foreign takeover of their territories.

Alas, centuries of indoctrination by the Qing had made the Guangdong people politically apathetic and oblivious to the plight of their provincial compatriots. Merchants who could have donated their wealth to provincial causes used it to buy titles and government positions for their own benefit. According to Ou Jujia, the Manchus would rather cede Guangdong to foreign powers than return it to its people. Consequently, Guangdong would be carved into spheres of influence and cease to exist as a complete province.<sup>50</sup>

Even if Guangdong were to be dominated by a single power, its people would be deployed to fight and oppress one another—India was a glaring example. Ou Jujia was partly responding to the despair of Wu Tingfang 伍廷芳 (1842–1922), a distinguished diplomat who “would rather see China a second India than that she should go on as she is, disgraced, powerless, and with no hope of amendment.”<sup>51</sup> For Ou Jujia, indications that Guangdong was becoming another India could be observed in Hong Kong, whose merchants donated

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<sup>50</sup> Ou, “Xin Guangdong,” 50–61.

<sup>51</sup> Cited from Edward J.M. Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: The Case of Kwangtung, 1895–1913* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 38–39.

more to celebrate the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria (r. 1837–1901) and to support the Boer War (1899–1902) than the Britons themselves. To his chagrin, they did not help fellow Han Chinese victims of the wars and natural disasters plaguing China. He postulated that if Guangdong's resources were used for the development of China instead, then the Han Chinese would regenerate.

Merchants provided the might of the British Empire and could do the same for China, if only they were as patriotic as their counterparts in America and Britain. Ou Jujia understood that the cultivation of patriotism in Guangdong merchants would have to be gradual, which explained his insistence that it must begin with love for their own province. After they had achieved independence, they could avoid the fate of the Jews—wealthy but without a homeland.<sup>52</sup>

### *The Monroe Doctrine for Guangdong*

Ou Jujia concluded that Guangdong belonged to the Guangdong people (*Guangdong zhe, Guangdongren zhi Guangdong ye* 廣東者，廣東人之廣東也).<sup>53</sup> His statement echoed the slogans based on the Monroe Doctrine—"America for the Americans" and "Asia for the Asians"—the latter of which had been used by Pan-Asianists in China and Japan. Based on this perspective, Ou Jujia had declared the Monroe Doctrine for Guangdong, and he

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<sup>52</sup> Ou, "Xin Guangdong," 61–64.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 91.

reproduced the principle of non-interference for the province, although the tenet developed from a defensive ideology to a justification for imperialistic purposes later in the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> Although Ou Jujia had not adequately addressed the issue of defense—he proposed that Guangdong depend on the anti-Manchu secret societies for military protection—he hoped to secure foreign support and respect for Guangdong’s independence by invoking familiar Western concepts and gentlemanly principles befitting an aspirant of modern, civilized nationhood.<sup>55</sup>

For Ou Jujia, the sovereignty of Guangdong rested with the Guangdong people. He likened China to a Western-style joint-stock company in which the Qing court was the management for its citizen-stakeholders. When management failed to safeguard its shareholders and betrayed their interests, they should change the management. He proposed that newspapers and schools be established to educate the people regarding the benefits of provincial autonomy and to prepare for Guangdong’s secession.<sup>56</sup> In summary, he deployed the early Chinese translations of Western political terms to explain the ways in which the secessionist provinces could merge to reconstitute the Chinese nation as a confederation based on the federalist principles of the United States.

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<sup>54</sup> Matten, *Imagining a Postnational World*, 19.

<sup>55</sup> Ou, “Xin Guangdong,” 72–91.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–57.

## Implications

### *Immediate Backlash*

With the publication of *New Guangdong*, Ou Jujia pioneered what Duara refers to as “the modern rhetoric which urged autonomy and even independence of the province as a means of protesting central or outside domination.”<sup>57</sup> Because it encouraged separatism when China was faced with the stark reality of partition, *New Guangdong* was instantly controversial. Liang Qichao endorsed Ou Jujia’s advocacy and reprinted *New Guangdong* in pamphlet form in *The China Discussion Paper* in Yokohama; Chinese literati first learned of Ou’s radical ideas through this pamphlet. Newspapers circulating in Guangdong, such as *Lingdong Daily* (*Lingdong ribao* 嶺東日報), published articles in support of “Guangdong for the Guangdong people.”<sup>58</sup> Qing official Ye Erkai 葉爾愷 (1864–1942) remarked that Chinese students in Japan became “presumptuous and arrogant” (*tusi xiaozhang* 徒肆囂張) and were filled with self-righteous hatred for the Manchus (*chou Man zhi yi* 仇滿之義) after reading *New Guangdong*. In 1902, Guangdong students in Yokohama founded the Guangdong Independence Association (Guangdong duli xiehui 廣東獨立協會) in response to rumors that the Qing government would cede Guangdong to France. The association later

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<sup>57</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 181.

<sup>58</sup> Cheng, *Diyu wenhua yu guojia rentong*, 36.

became part of Sun Yat-sen's Revive China Society (Xingzhonghui 興中會) and supported the Xinhai Revolution of October 1911.<sup>59</sup>

*New Guangdong* caused friction within the royalist party. The text infuriated Kang Youwei, who severed all ties with Ou Jujia, criticized his anti-Manchu views, and boycotted his activities. The royalists in California, while remaining loyal to and respectful of Kang, refused to expel Ou and replied that Ou's rhetoric could stimulate minds.<sup>60</sup> Liang Qichao, who risked incurring Kang's wrath by circulating *New Guangdong*, confirmed the text's radicalism and conceded that it seemed too bold for its time. Inspired, Liang wrote an unfinished novel about the rise of an independent southern Chinese province that subsequently merged with provinces that viewed it as a model and therefore declared their own independence.<sup>61</sup> The revolutionaries identified *New Guangdong* as a revolutionary tract, even though it did not reference their ideas. *New Guangdong* then became one of 22 books banned by the Qing court for allegedly subversive intent.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Feng, *Geming yishi*, 1 vol., 98. Feng Ziyou did not mention Ou Jujia in his account of the Guangdong Independence Association. It is unclear whether Ou Jujia was directly related to the association, which was nevertheless clearly inspired by his independence text.

<sup>60</sup> See the letters by Xu Qin 徐勤, a leader of the royalists in California and one of Kang Youwei's most loyal students, to Kang Youwei in *Kang Youwei yu Baohuangdang* 康有為與保皇黨 (Kang Youwei and the Royalists), ed. Shanghai shi wenwu baoguan weiyuanhui 上海市文物保管委員會 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1982), 200–204. Xu Qin might have supported Ou Jujia because they had worked together in the founding of newspapers and schools in Hong Kong and Yokohama. See Feng, *Geming yishi*, 1 vol., 50–53. Kang Youwei severed all ties with Ou Jujia in an open letter, which can be found in Kang Youwei, “Zhi Ou Jujia deng shu” 致歐榘甲等書 (A Letter to Ou Jujia and Others), in *Kang Youwei yu Baohuangdang*, 157.

<sup>61</sup> For Kang Youwei's reactions, see Xia Xiaohong 夏曉紅, “Xin Guangdong: cong zhengzhi dao wenxue” 新廣東: 從政治到文學 (New Guangdong: From Politics to Literature), *Xueshu yuekan* 學術月刊 (*Academic Monthly*) 48, no. 2 (2016): 114–117.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

### *Lasting Effects*

Ironically, the Qing censorship, Kang Youwei's fallout with Ou Jujia, and Liang Qichao's reprinting of *New Guangdong* generated publicity and increased its popularity.<sup>63</sup> *New Guangdong's* trajectory revealed the ways in which periodicals produced and reproduced material published in various venues, thereby producing a mobile reading public not unique to the transatlantic Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>64</sup> Its spread beyond a narrow circle of "forward-minded" literati and scope of influence demonstrated the extent to which the Chinese had domesticated the newspaper, which was an alien, Western-style medium for disseminating and discussing information, into an instrument of public opinion, self-determination, nationalism, and anti-imperialism. *New Guangdong* is characteristic of Chinese revolutionary writings at the time, which juxtaposed nations and political systems to determine the most ideal model for governing China. *New Guangdong* asserts that the dilution of traditional Han Chinese qualities, such as empathy and mutual help, was a result of foreign meddling and centuries-old Qing rule, illuminating the anxieties of a Han Chinese identity being overshadowed by Manchu and Western influences.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Sang Bing 桑兵, "Baohuanghui de zongzhi qibian yu zuzhi lihe" 保皇會的宗旨歧变與組織離合 (Changes in the Tenets of the Royalist Society and Their Effects on Organizational Unity), *Jindai shi yanjiu* 近代史研究, no. 3 (2002): 98.

<sup>64</sup> On the formation of a transatlantic reading public and shared values, see Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows, eds., *Press, Politics, and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr, eds., *Ten Books that Shaped the British Empire: Creating an Imperial Commons* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> For the Qing-Republican Chinese indigenization of newspapers, see Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: "Shibao" and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Barbara Mittler, A

The concept of a “Guangdong-ness” premised on Han-Manchu conflict was another innovation by Ou Jujia. In 1902, Yang Yulin 楊毓麟 (1872–1911), a Hunan literatus, published *New Hunan* (*Xin Hunan* 新湖南), a pamphlet arguing that the solution to China’s problems was to strengthen the provinces, not only as a prerequisite to modernization but also as a means of protection from interventions by the autocratic Qing court. For Yang Yulin, China was less a united nation than a polity whose eighteen provinces constituted eighteen independent states: if the Hunan people wanted to reform China, then Hunan had to be reformed first and that affairs in Hunan should be settled by the Hunan people (*Hunan zhe, wu Hunanren zhi Hunan ye* 湖南者, 吾湖南人之湖南也).<sup>66</sup>

As Stephen R. Platt suggests, a key component of Ou Jujia’s plan for Guangdong after its independence was to join forces with Guangxi and Hunan and to establish a southern state stretching from the Yangzi River to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>67</sup> Ou Jujia’s vision was thus not communal because it did not define the Guangdong people based on their province’s unique characteristics as a political unit in a permanent adversarial relationship with other Han Chinese communities. His secular ideas were not formed based on the native traditions,

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*Newspaper for China? Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai’s News Media, 1872–1912* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); and Rudolf G. Wagner, ed., *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870–1910* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

<sup>66</sup> For a summary of *New Hunan*, see Matten, *Imagining a Postnational World*, 2–3. See also Feng, *Geming yishi* 2, 125–129.

<sup>67</sup> Platt, *Provincial Patriots*, 122.

religious symbols, or social organizations that Guangdong had in abundance.<sup>68</sup> The main thrust of Ou Jujia's advocacy was directed against Manchu rule and foreign imperialism. Preoccupied as he was with defending Guangdong's interests and future against Qing exploitation, he insisted that the Han Chinese, regardless of their provincial affiliations, would come together to reconstitute China after dismantling the Qing.

Ou Jujia's image of Guangdong coincided with and was a subset of what modern historians have described as the "water frontier" of Asia, a "single region stretching from the Yangzi delta in central China southward through Vietnam and parts of Cambodia and Thailand to both coasts of the Malay Peninsula."<sup>69</sup> Guangdong qualifies as a part of this water frontier while having a sizable hinterland suitable for farming, as Ou Jujia mentioned. Guangdong's ever-increasing population meant that its food production was never sufficient, and its proximity to the rice-producing regions of Southeast Asia, such as Siam and Vietnam, made Guangzhou a critical gateway for foreign rice importation and internal and regional distribution through the Pearl River Delta.<sup>70</sup> The massive network of Guangdong merchants, laborers, and intermediaries operating beyond Chinese shores constituted a maritime commercial empire (not unlike that of the Fujian people), characterized by the flow of capital

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<sup>68</sup> David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

<sup>69</sup> For an assessment of this water frontier, see Craig A. Lockard, "The Sea Common to All: Maritime Frontiers, Port Cities, and Chinese Traders in the Southeast Asian Age of Commerce, ca. 1400–1750," *Journal of World History* 21, no. 2 (2010): 220.

<sup>70</sup> Seung-Joon Lee, *Gourmets in the Land of Famine: The Culture and Politics of Rice in Modern Canton* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).



and remittances.<sup>71</sup> As a source of indentured labor for developing the American Pacific coast and California, Guangdong became the center of a far-ranging Chinese diaspora and helped transform Hong Kong into a prosperous international port.<sup>72</sup> Ou Jujia understood the basis of Guangdong's prosperity to be maritime trade. For him, the British Empire became the world's strongest because seafaring merchants had fed its expansion—a quality shared by Guangdong with its overseas communities of sojourners and settlers.

## Conclusion

Following the publication of *New Guangdong*, Ou Jujia traveled to Singapore, where he observed the racial discrimination and opium addiction that Chinese laborers faced. He urged the Chinese merchants in Singapore to help the laborers. At the same time, he proposed that the merchants read business journals and open a business school to groom the next generation of Chinese leaders for trade with the world. The merchants, he suggested, should establish banks and agricultural and mining companies to compete for trading rights with foreign merchants.<sup>73</sup> In 1907, hoping to establish a trading company that could gather Guangdong's resources and compete with foreign firms, Ou Jujia partnered with Liu Shiji 劉

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<sup>71</sup> Gungwu Wang, "Merchants without Empires: The Hokkien Sojourning Communities," in *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350–1750*, edited by James D. Tracy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 400–421.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Ou Jujia, "Lun benpo shanghai ying ban zhi shi" 論本坡商會應辦之事 (A Discussion of What Singapore's General Chinese Trade Affairs Association Should Do), in *Ou Jujia xiansheng zhuan*, 111–127.

士驥 (1857–1909), a businessman and Guangdong literatus. But Liu was assassinated—some claimed by Kang Youwei—in Guangzhou.

Ou Jujia was disappointed and maintained a low profile until the outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution in October 1911. He accepted the invitation of General Cai E 蔡鐸 (1882–1916) of Yunnan 雲南, his ex-student at the School of Current Affairs, to help develop the province for commerce and industry. But before he could begin, he passed away at home in January 1912.<sup>74</sup>

For Ou Jujia, the Guangdong people had negotiated their own passage to modernity. In fact, he insinuated that maritime China was Guangdong and that maritime linkages were the conditions for modernity and progress, as proven by the success of Britain. Maritime trade had supplied much of the revenue enjoyed by the Qing court after the Taiping Rebellion. Even after the eclipse of Guangzhou as a trading port by Shanghai and other cities, Guangdong continued to be the center of capital flows, the engine of intellectual and political changes, and a source of labor for Chinese and Western business enterprises.<sup>75</sup> Guangdong was in the position to become the first independent province to counter the threat of an imperialistic partition of China and to spearhead the formation of a federated Chinese nation.

As Duara suggests, Ou Jujia’s appeal “lay in his ability to legitimate the growing provincial

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<sup>74</sup> Li, “Ou Jujia xiansheng zhuan,” 35–40.

<sup>75</sup> For the importance of customs revenue to the late Qing court and the economic links between China and the West in the nineteenth century, see Hamashita Takeshi, *China, East Asia, and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2008). See also van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*.

consciousness by affiliating it with the rhetoric of national survival”<sup>76</sup>; however, to Ou Jujia’s disappointment, Guangdong did not secede from the Qing until November 1911, when it declared independence to join the newly founded Republic of China.

While provincial networks and traditions had existed since the Ming dynasty, it was during the late Qing dynasty that “relatively well-integrated provincial elites in the Yangzi valley began to articulate a political role for themselves as true defenders of the nation against foreign aggressors.”<sup>77</sup> While historians have suggested the ways in which Ou Jujia and other Han Chinese literati had generally spoken out against Manchu rulers and pointed out China’s need for a broader role for local elites, they have not fully explored the global origins of Chinese provincialism. By engaging with empire and imperialism in *New Guangdong*, Ou Jujia demonstrated that the production of provincial consciousness and identity could be global. While Guangdong, first invented as an administrative unit, acquired complex, diverse meanings during its historical existence, the idea of Guangdong became an ideological force that overlapped with nationalism and revolution during the late Qing period. This ideological force transcended culture, ethnicity, and language in what may be called “the spirit of inclusive provincial integrity.”<sup>78</sup> Provincial consciousness, spurred by a widespread intuition that Qing China and Guangdong itself would soon be partitioned, became

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<sup>76</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 183.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>78</sup> Larry Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia: History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 5.

geographically imaginable and territorially meaningful in *New Guangdong*. By highlighting the possibility of Guangdong as both a source and an object of change, Ou Jujia contributed to making the “province” central to early twentieth-century debates over China’s future. By identifying what Ou Jujia perceived in the old Guangdong and expected of a new one, this chapter demonstrates how his treatise challenged the imperative of national unity. Such a challenge had unwittingly triggered forces that, as post-Qing warlordism had shown, threatened to permanently divide China.

## Chapter Five: Liang Jushi and the Idea of Practical Enterprise

### Introduction

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Qing Empire was in a deeper crisis than it had faced in previous decades. This crisis was set against the backdrop of domestic rebellions and wars with foreign powers. These rebellions and wars depleted the imperial coffers and ultimately deprived the late Qing state of its land revenue and taxes. Provincial governors who helped suppress the rebellions gained control of the land revenues, using them to experiment with Western institutions and technologies in strengthening the embattled empire. Paradoxically, the conflicts that crippled the Qing state introduced new sources of income. The court increasingly relied on the treaty ports that opened after the Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860) and on the Chinese Maritime Customs Service (*Da Qing huangjia haiguan zong shuiwusi* 大清皇家海關總稅務司) to stay solvent. But for the Qing state, this came at the price of surrendering its economic sovereignty to foreign powers.<sup>1</sup>

In response to the need to generate more revenue and defend China with modern armies, Qing statesmen and provincial governors developed the program of “official supervision-merchant management” (*guandu shangban* 官督商辦) to acquire Western military technology and build relevant infrastructure. Under official supervision, merchants

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<sup>1</sup> Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

founded the firms and factories that would constitute China's first modern industries. The new industrial facilities comprised steamship companies and telegraph lines to transmit military intelligence, coal mines to supply fuel for the newly built arsenals, railroads to transport coal and personnel, textile mills to provide cloth for army uniforms, and iron and steel works to furnish raw materials for weapons and railway tracks.

In retrospect, the program did not massively industrialize China; the basis of late Qing China's economy remained agrarian. Foreign banks and merchants maintained their control of Chinese businesses and treaty ports. Chinese armies continued to suffer defeats in the Sino-French War (1884–1885) and the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895).<sup>2</sup> For many China historians, China's "failure" to industrialize and respond adequately to the Western impact suggested little more than cultural conservatism and institutional rigidity.<sup>3</sup>

Although recent historians have more positively reassessed China's modern industries as major components of the Qing fiscal-military complex, they continue to focus on the efforts of the ruling elite—statesmen, provincial governors, and the compradors working for them.<sup>4</sup> Historians pay scant attention to the literati outside this historical group of "self-

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization: Sheng Hsuan-huai (1844–1916) and Mandarin Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958); Yen-p'ing Hao, *The Comprador in Nineteenth Century China: Bridge between East and West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> John K. Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the Chinese Coast: The Opening of Treaty Ports, 1842–1854* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953); Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-chih Restoration, 1862–1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957); Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen R. Halsey, *Quest for Power: European Imperialism and the Making of Chinese Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

strengtheners,” let alone analyze how they perceived the issue of economic sovereignty during the late Qing period.

Indeed, one of the key questions that preoccupied late Qing literati was how to strengthen China without compromising its economic sovereignty. This chapter examines the writings of Liang Jushi 梁居實 (1843–1911), a “Guangdong literatus” and registered native of Guangdong who produced “culture” (*wen* 文) and texts, such as poems, prose, and literary letters, and proposed solutions to resolve the Qing Empire’s crises.<sup>5</sup>

### *Some Parallels*

Liang Jushi was a native of Guangdong, which had produced the most prominent political thinkers of the late Qing period, such as Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), and Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925). Compared to the reformers like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, who believed in improving the existing institutions to transform China into an industrial power, or the revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen, who argued that only the overthrow of Manchu rule could save China from decline and extinction, Liang Jushi and his cohort advocated *shiye* 實業 (practical enterprise). Liang Jushi distinguished this cohort from those who indulged in *kongtan* 空談 (empty talk) about *jiuguo* 救國 (saving the nation). Unlike the politically vocal reformers and revolutionaries,

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<sup>5</sup> Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning: Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 13.

Liang Jushi was a moderate literatus who quietly focused on building a sustainable industrial base for “China.”

Another parallel—or contrast—might also be drawn between Liang Jushi, or his cohort, and the “provincial patriots” of Hunan Province, whom Stephen R. Platt has studied. As Platt suggests, although Hunan was an interior backwater far from the coastal regions and treaty port-cities that have preoccupied most China historians, it produced a disproportionate number of reformers and revolutionaries who wielded a correspondingly disproportionate influence over the late Qing Empire. By resurrecting the cult of late Ming~early Qing political thinker Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1682), the most prominent Hunan literati of the late Qing period perceived little contradiction between their provincial and national loyalties and argued that Hunan should pioneer the salvation of China.<sup>6</sup> In Guangdong, however, the literati received their foreign ideas directly from exposure to overseas missionaries and traders and from overseas travel. The academies in Guangdong, whether classical or modern, were relatively new, having produced few historically established thinkers with whom the literati could effectively form an intellectual lineage.

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen R. Platt, *Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).



*A Glance at Liang Jushi's Identities and Network*

Nevertheless, the Guangdong literati could still be categorized into what might be called “scholarly circles” (*xueren quan* 學人圈 or *xueren qunti* 學人群體)—a familiar theme in the existing Chinese scholarship on late Qing literati.<sup>7</sup> Liang Jushi belonged to a small cohort of Hakka 客家 poets who corresponded with one another through poems, prose, and literary letters. They formed a circle based on kinship, marriage, and especially friendship. They had no obvious leader or patron, suggesting that relations were equal rather than hierarchical.<sup>8</sup>

In this circle premised on scholarly correspondence, Liang Jushi was the most “political” for espousing non-statist and highly provincial views on dominant political issues. He thus helped to enrich the intellectual and political landscapes of late Qing China beyond the binary of reformers and revolutionaries; because he did not descend from any intellectual lineage, he could propose alternatives to the historiographically validated “norm” of the late Qing Chinese past.

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<sup>7</sup> Lu Yin 陸胤, *Zhengjiao cunxu yu wenjiao zhuanxing: jindai xueshushi shang de Zhang Zhidong xueren quan* 政教存續與文教轉型: 近代學術史上的張之洞學人圈 (The continuation of statecraft learning and the transformation of Confucian teachings: The scholarly circle of Zhang Zhidong in modern intellectual history) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Guo Zhenyi 郭真義, *Wan Qing Yuedong keji shiren qunti yanjiu* 晚清粵東客籍詩人群體研究 (A study of the Hakka poetry circle of late Qing eastern Guangdong) (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 2004).

That said, Liang Jushi and his network of educators and industrial entrepreneurs left few writings.<sup>9</sup> Liang Jushi's own writings, few as they were, would most likely have been lost had his descendants not collated them prior to the Communist takeover of China in 1949 and published the collection in Taiwan in 1959. This collection, titled *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji* 梁詩五先生遺稿集 (The collected writings of Liang Jushi), comprises undated and unpublished essays on economic and policy issues (*zheng jing ce shu* 政經策述), forewords and congratulatory messages (*xu ji xuan zuo* 序記選作), literary letters (*shudu* 書牘), and poems (*shige* 詩歌). Literary letters, addressed to family and friends and apparently unintended for posterity, constitute more than half the collection. In the absence of any scholarship (be it Chinese, English, or Japanese) and archival or primary materials on Liang Jushi, which indicates how neglected or obscure he has been in the current historiography, this chapter mines his literary letters to delineate his network of literati and industrial entrepreneurs. Privately circulated, his essays and letters wielded little influence in late Qing China. Nevertheless, his letters reveal opinions on the post-Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901) “New Policies” designed to arrest the further decline of the dynasty.<sup>10</sup> Written in the final

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<sup>9</sup> Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905) and Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912) left voluminous writings. However, their writings were more literary than political. Moreover, as suggested by his letters, Liang Jushi appeared to enjoy a closer relationship with the Chinese entrepreneurs of Southeast Asia.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1898–1912: The Xinzhen Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1993).

decade of the dynasty and in their author's own twilight years, they convey a Guangdong literatus's crystalized yet marginalized viewpoints on reforms.

Born and raised in the “Hakka homeland” of the Jiaying 嘉應 department in northeastern Guangdong, Liang Jushi and his fellow natives (*tongxiang* 同鄉; those with registered households in Jiaying, who took the civil service examinations in Jiaying, or belonged to the lineages of Jiaying as indicated in genealogies) sojourned in Cantonese-speaking Guangzhou, the capital and economic center of the province. They were members of what historian Steven B. Miles has identified as an “important cohort of newcomers operating in the literary and scholarly circles of cosmopolitan Guangzhou,” albeit during the late nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Liang Jushi's grandfather migrated to Guangdong from Fujian and was the first in the family to have taken and passed the civil service examinations; his father had attained the *juren* 舉人 status (i.e., a provincial graduate), which Liang Jushi himself would receive.<sup>12</sup> Most of Liang Jushi's friends were self-made entrepreneurs or literati like himself—none of them had a lineage genealogy. As outsiders and social upstarts, the Jiaying literati were peripheral to the cultural and economic development of Guangzhou and its surrounding Pearl River Delta region. However, by sojourning in Guangzhou, enrolling in its academies, and managing hostels and clan shrines catering to fellow prefecturals, they had

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<sup>11</sup> Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Liang Yunduan 梁筠端, “Jiazhuan” 家傳 (Family biography), in *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 梁詩五先生遺稿集 (The collected writings of Liang Jushi) (Taipei: Liang Weichang, 1959), i.

maintained a presence “in absolute disproportion to their lack of geographical proximity.”<sup>13</sup>

How they negotiated their prefectural and/or provincial identities and whether they extended these identities beyond “China” or “Guangdong” remains to be seen.

A Hakka and a Guangdong provincial, Liang Jushi possessed multiple identities that make it difficult to render any generalizations about him within the context of his cohort: which of the two identities—Hakka or Guangdong—dominated his thoughts and self-representation? Indeed, Liang Jushi was trying to conceptualize and perhaps reconcile this set of seemingly incompatible relations when he advocated breaking prefectural divides between Jiaying and other parts of Guangdong and deployed the term “my Guangdong” (*wu Yue* 吾粵) in describing his province.<sup>14</sup> He identified more with being a provincial than with being a Hakka, all the while not seeing these as distinct parts of himself. Under the Qing governors selected for skills suited for rule in specific local conditions, provincial identities acquired their own character and strengthened over time.<sup>15</sup>

As John Fitzgerald elaborates, the mere creation of a territorial unit of government “generates interactions among and between parts of the political system and elements of the

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<sup>13</sup> Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 38.

<sup>14</sup> Liang Jushi 梁居實, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji* 梁詩五先生遺稿集 (The collected writings of Liang Jushi) (Taipei: Liang Weichang, 1959), 70.

<sup>15</sup> R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644–1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 289.

social, cultural, and economic environment.”<sup>16</sup> Liang Jushi himself wrote that administrative boundaries shaped Guangdong’s political identity (*huajie fenjiang, lidai linian, jieyou dingsuo* 劃界分疆, 歷代歷年, 皆有定所).<sup>17</sup> However, given the informal structure of rule that characterized the major global (i.e., Western) empires at the turn of the twentieth century, economic imperialism took precedence over territorial gains, and Liang Jushi was cognizant of how these empires could “inconspicuously partition” Guangdong (*wuxing zhi guafen* 無形之瓜分). He thus proposed using human talent and material wealth to safeguard China’s economic sovereignty.<sup>18</sup> Although his closest friends remained Hakka, he identified all Guangdong sojourners in Nanyang 南洋 or Southeast Asia as fellow provincials, regardless of the language they spoke in their native prefectures—whether it was Cantonese, Hakka, or Teochew (the three largest language groups in Guangdong). The “province” became his rallying call and overarching concern as he corresponded with his friends and engaged in the political questions of his time.

### *Liang Jushi’s Notion of the “State”*

In referring to the polity under which he lived and served, Liang Jushi never used the term *Qing* 清 or *Daqing* 大清 (Great Qing). His preferred terms were *Woguo* 我國 (our

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<sup>16</sup> John Fitzgerald, “The Province in History,” in *Rethinking China’s Provinces*, edited by John Fitzgerald (London: Routledge, 2002), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 70.

<sup>18</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 78.

nation) and *Zhongguo* 中國—the modern toponym for China. He routinely used the character *guo* 國 and quite frequently the compound *guojia* 國家 to refer not to the Qing state but to the Chinese nation. In a letter to famous educator Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912), Liang Jushi suggested that with mass education, the nation might be “[temporarily] vanquished but ultimately un-vanquished” (*guo sui wang zhong bu wang* 國雖亡終不亡). If the people’s (*min* 民) minds were opened, talented people (*rencai* 人才) would emerge to preserve the nation and protect the nation’s territories (*bao guotu* 保國土)—the people comprise the nation (*guo zhe, ji ren er cheng ye* 國者，積人而成也).<sup>19</sup>

Liang Jushi’s notion of popular sovereignty, indicative of—if not progressive for—the late Qing period, which was historiographically dominated by discussions of reform and revolution, suggested that the state figured little in his definition of nation. This definition was a reworking of another late Ming~early Qing literatus Gu Yanwu’s 顧炎武 (1613–1682) dictum that though a dynasty or state (Gu’s definition of *guo*) might collapse, the *tianxia* 天下 (understood variously as civilization, the Chinese cultural ecumene, or empire) would never be lost. This idea of *tianxia* was prevalent until the turn of the twentieth century when the disappearance of Chinese culture and the Chinese race appeared imminent.<sup>20</sup> Liang

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<sup>19</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 82–83.

<sup>20</sup> Gu Yanwu derived his dictum from his understanding of the dynastic transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasties. For the interplay and subtleties between *guo* and *tianxia*, see William T. Rowe, *Speaking of Profit: Bao Shichen and Reform in Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 185; and Wang Gungwu, *Renewal: The Chinese State and the New Global History* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013).

Jushi's writings formed part of a new genre of *wangguo* 亡國 (vanquished nation) literature that "rearticulated away from its traditional Chinese meaning of a change of dynasty to a modern meaning of colonization."<sup>21</sup>

Like most authors of *wangguo* literature, Liang Jushi was not a defeatist. He explained not only why China could be vanquished but also how China could survive the onslaught of Western imperialism—a key reason, he suggested, for China's weakness—and strengthen itself through the development of education and industrial entrepreneurship. By "industrial entrepreneurship," I refer to Liang Jushi's proposal that China should first establish new industries to compete with Western enterprises in the indigenous and global economies; the profits could then be channeled to building new academic institutions and vocational schools that would nurture China's technical expertise and maintain Chinese industrial enterprises. By stressing the "private" (*si* 私), Liang Jushi avoided the "statism" of his contemporaries, who continued to locate sovereignty, political legitimacy, and "the highest source of good" in a centralized state and developed state-centric ideas of citizenship and sovereignty from Western legal principles and political experiences.<sup>22</sup>

The rise by the late nineteenth century of a "rapidly fusing mercantile and gentry elite," as exemplified by Liang Jushi's associates, suggests the existence of a public (*gong*

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<sup>21</sup> Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885–1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 4.

公) sphere that represented all the private interests under its domain and regulated its own affairs. Although this public sphere could aggrandize collective interests at the expense of state power, it could also assimilate into the state and become a tool of governance.<sup>23</sup> For Liang Jushi, the ideal was a mix of the two extremes: the landowning or degree-holding gentry and mercantile elite, by representing the collective interests of their locality, had to renegotiate their powers with the state amid changes in Chinese views of their monarchy or emperor system at the turn of the twentieth century.

For Liang Jushi, the state, as the implied opposite of private enterprise and interests, was counterproductive to industrial development in China. Perhaps because he was an official, he did not criticize specific state policies, but we might infer that he was responding to the program of *guandu shangban* 管督商辦 (“official supervised, merchant managed”). Although Liang Jushi did not refer to Western economic theories, his views on the economy resembled the *laissez-faire* concept that conceives of the state as an obstacle to economic development and a potential source of many economic problems. Liang Jushi was also responding to Western economic imperialism in China when he suggested that the Chinese should accumulate talent (*cai* 才) and wealth (*cai* 財) to recover economic rights (*quan* 權) over their resources, which were being appropriated by Western empires as they expanded

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<sup>23</sup> William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984); William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); Mary Backus Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China, Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); Frederick Wakeman, Jr., “Boundaries of the Public Sphere in Ming and Qing China,” *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998): 167-189.



into China.<sup>24</sup> This chapter suggests that Liang Jushi's views on the nation and its economy stemmed from a provincial concern—the possible foreign colonization or partition of Guangdong due to the Qing state's inability to develop the province economically and protect it militarily. He was inspired not only by the West, Japan, and vanquished nations such as Poland—an intellectual trend in China at the turn of the twentieth century that Rebecca E. Karl has investigated—but also by the Western colonies in Southeast Asia, where his friends had become highly successful entrepreneurs.<sup>25</sup> By regarding these Chinese-populated colonies more as a source of inspiration than a symbol of subjugation, Liang Jushi also presented a more nuanced understanding of foreign imperialism.

### *Chapter Outline*

This chapter comprises four main sections. It begins with an introduction of Liang Jushi's "moderate," transnational network of educators and industrial entrepreneurs, almost all of whom were born in or could trace their ancestry to Guangdong. The second section explores Liang Jushi's anxieties about the possible foreign colonization and partitioning of Guangdong, which prompted his rethinking of state-provincial relations in an increasingly subjugated China—Qing or otherwise. The third section examines how his viewpoint merged two dominant strands of thought of the moderate Qing literati seeking to rescue the nation—

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<sup>24</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 88-90.

<sup>25</sup> Karl, *Staging the World*.

national salvation through education (*jiaoyu jiuguo* 教育救國) and national salvation through industry (*shiye jiuguo* 實業救國)—as he elaborated on why industry should be prioritized. The final section analyzes, from Liang’s perspective, the implications of the colonial experience in colonized Southeast Asia for China and how it could be transplanted to Guangdong, which matched the conditions of Western colonies and might thus serve as a model province for an industrializing China. The entanglement of provincial interests with national fate reveals why, despite his downplaying of state control of the local economy and resources, Liang Jushi continued to take for granted that Guangdong constituted part of the Chinese nation.

### **Liang Jushi and Friends**

#### *The Early Life of Liang Jushi*

Born in Jiaying Prefecture 嘉應縣 (later known as Meizhou 梅州), Guangdong, in 1843, Liang Jushi was raised in a family of letters. His father and grandfather had achieved success in the civil service examinations, and he and his cousins had studied under local notables during his formative years.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1870s, before achieving success in the civil service examinations and fame as a poet, Liang Jushi toured Nanyang.<sup>27</sup> If the lives and career trajectories of many of his friends

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<sup>26</sup> Liang Yunduan, “Jiazhuan,” i.

<sup>27</sup> Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲, *Huang Zunxian quanji* 黃遵憲全集 (The complete writings of Huang Zunxian) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 204.

were any indication, he might have traveled to consider seeking his fortune in Southeast Asia, which offered refuge from the devastation of post-Taiping Jiaying. Among those whom he considered friends—their names frequently appear in his writings—were Pan Xiangchu 潘祥初 (1851–1911), Zhang Rongxuan 張榕軒 (1851–1911), and Zhang Bishi 張弼士 (better known as Cheong Fatt Tze, 1840–1916). All were Jiaying natives who formed trading empires in Southeast Asia and southern China, suggesting the existence of a strong, diasporic business network based on native-place ties.

Zhang Rongxuan, for instance, was Zhang Bishi's protégé in Sumatra before starting his own business in coffee, rubber, and tea. Unlike the compradors in treaty-port China, the Jiaying traders were truly entrepreneurs—they accumulated their own capital and were under contract to neither European firms nor the Qing circuit intendants (*daotai* 道臺) who oversaw the Sino-foreign settlements such as Shanghai. Enjoying greater economic and social freedom in the Western colonies of Southeast Asia than in China, these merchants owned estates and plantations and were respected leaders of local Chinese communities in colonial Southeast Asia.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1880s, while his *tongxiang* continued to found banks, factories, and shipping lines, Liang Jushi resided in Jiaying and Guangzhou to prepare for the civil service

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<sup>28</sup> Ching-Hwang Yen, *The Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution: With Special Reference to Singapore and Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976); Ching-Hwang Yen, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800–1911* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1986); Michael R. Godley, *The Mandarin-Capitalists from Nanyang: Overseas Chinese Enterprise in the Modernization of China, 1893–1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

examinations. His distant cousin Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905), a Jiaying native who shared his interest in poetry, recommended him (unsuccessfully) for service in the Qing’s Japan legation with him.<sup>29</sup> In 1889, Liang Jushi passed the provincial examinations and became a *juren*.

Liang Jushi did not immediately assume an official position, however. Famous for his lucid poetry and prose, he moved to Guangzhou and lectured at the Yangcheng 羊城 and Yingyuan 應元 academies, which supplemented the core classical or Confucian curriculum with purportedly more “concrete studies” (*shixue* 實學) such as mathematics and the sciences. He befriended Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912), a poet and fellow educator, and one of his daughters married Qiu’s son Qiu Niantai 丘念臺 (1894–1967), who would become a Nationalist bureaucrat after the Qing collapse. For Guangdong’s educators and school instructors, poetry was a common avocation and the main mode of expression for feelings and political aspirations. Through poetry, Liang Jushi was also acquainted with Wen Zhonghe 溫仲和 (1849–1904), who had studied under the respected Guangdong literatus Chen Li 陳澧 (1810–1882) and sought to synthesize evidential scholarship (or “scientific” research) with moral and political concerns.<sup>30</sup> Liang Jushi also knew Huang Xiquan 黃錫銓

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<sup>29</sup> Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲, *Huang Zunxian quanji* 黃遵憲全集 (The complete writings of Huang Zunxian) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 704-705. Huang Zunxian was serving as a minister to Japan when he recommended Liang Jushi for an overseas appointment.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1984), 246-247; Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 201-236.

(1852–1925), who founded banking and industrial enterprises in Southeast Asia and sponsored education and infrastructure building in Jiaying.

Liang Jushi met the moderate Guangdong (specifically Jiaying) literati while preparing for the civil service examinations. By taking the examinations and competing for the ultimate prestige of attaining an official degree or title, Liang Jushi remained part of the traditional educational and political system. However, most of his cohort were entrepreneurs and civil servants with agendas quite different from his, at least during the 1870s and 1880s and prior to his production of literary letters and policy essays at the turn of the twentieth century. For a time, then, Liang Jushi viewed passing the examinations and subsequently obtaining an office as the main route to success. At the same time, however, his elite strategy, or method for creating an intellectual lineage that would begin with his grandfather's success in the examinations, did not involve forming national networks. He stopped at the provincial examinations, appeared content with his *juren* status, and expressed little desire to take the highest metropolitan examinations and enter the circuit of the national elite. For him, regional networks mattered more than national ones.

Over time, as we shall observe, he would not only identify business and other non-traditional pursuits as viable strategies for social advancement, but also consider them more important than the bureaucratic career that he enjoyed for developing a province or the nation. The existence of Liang Jushi's coterie of entrepreneurs, literati, and officials

reinforces Miles's point that the line between the gentry class and other social groups, such as merchants, was porous in Guangdong.<sup>31</sup>

### *Compiling a Gazetteer*

Presumably, Liang Jushi and his friends spoke the Hakka vernacular, but it was not widely used in their letters, poetry, and prose. Most of Liang Jushi's poems were written in the standard classical Chinese in which he and candidates for the civil service examinations were trained. During the 1890s, with Jiaying literatus Liang Guorui 梁國瑞 (dates unknown), Liang Jushi helped compile the *Guangxu Jiaying zhouzhi* 光緒嘉應州志 (The gazetteer of Jiaying Prefecture, Guangxu edition) by soliciting co-authors such as Wen Zhonghe, who became its chief editor, and funds from Zhang Bishi and Zhang Rongxuan. The choice of Wen Zhonghe as editor-in-chief was deliberate. An evidential scholar, Wen Zhonghe helped to standardize the lexicon and phonetics of the Hakka language with references to classical texts and existing vernacular Hakka literature.<sup>32</sup>

But the gazetteer emphasized the historical geography of Jiaying Prefecture rather than Hakka history, identity, language, and other “ethnic” characteristics. Even Wen Zhonghe's extensive treatise on Hakka customs was intended to establish Hakka affinities

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<sup>31</sup> Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Li Ling 李玲, “Wan Qing Kejia zhongxinqu de ‘Kejia zhongyuan lun’: yi Jiaying jingying de zuqun lunshu wei zhongxin” 晚清客家中心區的‘客家中原論’: 以嘉應薈英的族群論述為中心 (The discourse of Central Plains Hakkas in the late Qing period: a study of the elites of Jiaying), *Quanqiu Kejia yanjiu* 全球客家研究 5, no. 8 (2017): 41–76.

with the rest of China.<sup>33</sup> The national past of how the Hakka people originated in the Central Plains or Yellow River basin and migrated to southeast China mattered more than the assertion of a local, unique identity.

In the gazetteer, the Hakka literati maintained that they were part of the Han race vis-à-vis the Manchus. While claiming that they and the Hoklo people in Fujian Province were racially purer than the speakers of Cantonese because they originated within the center of the Han civilization in Henan Province, they struck a delicate balance between Hakka pride and the idea of a unified Han race against the Manchu state.<sup>34</sup> By defining the Hakka as Han, the gazetteer could be considered a product with national implications.

But the Manchus were not the only imagined adversary. The systemic racism of white-dominated colonial societies in Southeast Asia predisposed both Hakka and non-Hakka migrants to the nationalist and republican ideas of the anti-Manchu literati, who advocated that the sojourners' aims for native-place development were intertwined with the fate of the Chinese nation: a better China would result in a better Jiaying and Guangdong. A nationalist consciousness of the foreign threat to China prompted the Chinese who directly experienced

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<sup>33</sup> Sow-Theng Leong, *Migration and Ethnicity in Chinese History: Hakkas, Pengmin, and Their Neighbors*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 80.

<sup>34</sup> May-bo Ching, "Classifying Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Late Qing Native-Place Textbooks and Gazetteers," in *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China*, edited by Tze-ki Hon and Robert Culp (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 55-78.

foreign power in the Chinese treaty ports or colonial Southeast Asia to interpret their cultural identity as part of a universal Han race and Chinese nationhood.<sup>35</sup>

Having helped annotate Huang Zunxian's magnum opus *Riben guozhi* 日本國志 (Treatises on Japan), Liang Jushi enjoyed considerable knowledge of Japan.<sup>36</sup> Liang Jushi's students included He Shoupeng 何壽朋 (1866–1921), the son of China's first minister to Japan, He Ruzhang 何如璋 (1838–1891). In 1903, most probably at the recommendation of He Shoupeng and Huang Zunxian, who had both served as Qing diplomats in Japan, Liang Jushi was appointed a counselor (*canzan* 參贊) and trade representative for the Qing legation in Japan. He then served as minister to Japan (1905), minister to Germany (1906), and minister to Belgium (1909). The well-read and well-traveled Liang Jushi was well-versed in diplomacy, *qiaowu* 僑務 (matters relating to overseas Chinese), local defense, education, mining, and industry.<sup>37</sup> His thinking was motivated not only by his overseas experiences but also by his fear that Guangdong—or even the larger unit that was the Chinese nation—would be colonized or partitioned by foreign powers.

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<sup>35</sup> Gregor Benton and Hong Liu, *Dear China: Emigrant Letters and Remittances, 1820–1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 178.

<sup>36</sup> Huang, *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 406–407.

<sup>37</sup> Liang Yunduan, “Jiazhuan,” 1–2.



## Partitioning China—The Guangdong Experience

### *The Fear of Partition*

At first glance, Liang Jushi does not appear to be unique among the many late-nineteenth-century Chinese literati who discussed the negative implications of China's national weakness for its survival and territorial integrity. For concerned literati and political cartoonists of the late Qing era, the fear of China being carved up like a melon (*guafen* 瓜分) by foreign powers was a central motif. Graphic and literary depictions of the melon icon were widely circulated among millions of Chinese readers of magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets. The emergence of print culture in the coastal cities ensured that for many educated Chinese, national sovereignty (*zhuquan* 主權) and territorial integrity were the “highest political aim” during the late Qing period.<sup>38</sup> Liang Jushi's concerns were more provincial. While the picture he painted for Qing or post-Qing China was not dystopian, he imagined the full impact of foreign imperialism on Guangdong Province should the Qing state collapse, and he considered ways for China to survive the fall.

Liang Qichao offered perhaps the most elaborate treatise on the possible partition of China. In an 1899 article entitled *Guafen weiyan* 瓜分危言 (A note of warning on the partition of China), he argued that in the event of a partition, the Chinese, rather than the

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<sup>38</sup> Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: “Shibao” and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872–1912* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); Marc Andre Matten, *Imagining a Postnational World: Hegemony and Space in Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 7.

foreign powers that carved up China, would be most responsible. His view was that the Chinese had destroyed the capacity that China once had to resist a foreign takeover (i.e., a functioning state, land, people, talent, warriors, economic sovereignty, and military power). He suggested three major reasons for China's imminent partition: 1) China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War; 2) China's surrender of sovereignty over its northeastern provinces to Russia, which exposed it to further foreign encroachment on its territories; and 3) the ruling elite's rejection of meaningful reforms to safeguard their own interests.

A key figure in the failed Hundred Days' Reform that sought to institute a constitutional, parliamentary government in China, Liang Qichao blamed China's de facto ruler, Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧 (1835–1908), and, arguably her most important minister, Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), for the nation's troubles. Nationalism, or the Chinese consciousness that they were a nation, provided a cure. As a Guangdong literatus, he did not suggest a separate provincial identity until Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916), the first president of the Republic of China, tried to restore monarchical rule.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Liang Qichao quanji* 梁啟超全集 (The complete writings of Liang Qichao), Vol. 1. (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), 299-301. Cixi ordered the arrest of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and other participants of the Hundred Days' Reform and placed the Guangxu 光緒 emperor (r. 1875–1908) under house arrest. Liang Qichao fled to Japan, where he published writings highly critical of Manchu rule.

### *Guangdong Reacted*

The strongest advocate for Guangdong independence from Qing rule was Ou Jujia 歐榘甲 (1870–1912), another Guangdong literatus and disciple of Kang Youwei. In his magnum opus *Xin Guangdong* 新廣東 (New Guangdong), which first appeared as a series of articles in San Francisco in 1901 and was reprinted by Liang Qichao as a pamphlet in Yokohama in 1902, Ou Jujia explained why Guangdong was a model province—it was cosmopolitan, developed, and modern. He argued for its independence so that it could first inspire other provinces to secede from the Qing and then reunite with them in a federated China. For him, Guangdong’s independence was feasible due to its peripheral location, maritime trade, and global network of capital and labor. Its revenues should be channeled to local development rather than to the imperial state that would squander them. In rousing rhetoric, he concluded that “Guangdong belonged to the Guangdong people” (*Guangdong zhe, Guangdongren zhi Guangdong ye* 廣東者, 廣東人之廣東也).<sup>40</sup>

Like Ou Jujia, Liang Jushi agreed that Qing-dynasty Guangdong had lost more territory to foreign powers than any other province. The Qing government signed away its sovereignty over Guangzhouwan 廣州灣, Hong Kong, Macau, Xiangshan 香山, and Xin’an 新安, and Guangdong literati feared that Guangzhou and Hainan Island would be ceded as

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<sup>40</sup> Ou Jujia, “Xin Guangdong” 新廣東 (New Guangdong), in *Ou Jujia xiansheng zhuan* 歐榘甲先生傳 (The biography of Ou Jujia), edited by Li Shaoling 李少陵 (Taipei: Daye shudian, 1960), 91.

well in future conflicts or wars with Britain and France. Ou Jujia believed that the partition of China was imminent, so the people of Guangdong should organize themselves and resist the foreign takeover of their homes, property, and territory.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps fearing that he might be accused of treason—he was serving as a diplomat—and that Guangdong might be irrevocably separated from the Chinese nation, Liang Jushi did not explicitly advocate Guangdong independence. (As his involvement in compiling the Jiaying gazetteer suggests, he believed that his prefecture and province were unquestionably part of China.) Rather, he supported the idea of having Guangdong prepare for that possibility (not inevitability); whether China was Qing or republican was a secondary consideration.

Liang Jushi was serving as a diplomat in Japan (1903–1906) when the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and postwar negotiations were underway, and he paid close attention to how the events unfolded. He anticipated that a scramble for China would not take place. Britain and the United States preferred free trade and open competition to outright territorial annexation, and limited trading rights pegged to territorial jurisdiction, while a victorious Japan needed only a sphere of influence over Korea and northeastern China. They would deter Russia from violating China's territorial integrity and making further claims to

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<sup>41</sup> Ou, "Xin Guangdong," 50-61.

Chinese territories. Britain and France, whose spheres of influence overlapped in Guangdong, would respect Chinese sovereignty over the province.<sup>42</sup>

Liang Jushi understood the shift at the turn of the twentieth century of European “formal” empires to “informal” structures of rule in Africa and Asia, where colonizers deployed strategies ranging from trade and elite cooptation to a display of military force—or gunboat diplomacy—to gain hegemony over indigenous polities and populations. These empires, save perhaps Russia, were more maritime than terrestrial, and they were more interested in controlling sources of capital, labor, and raw materials than in annexing territories, where the costs of governance might negate the economic benefits of owning the colonies.<sup>43</sup> For Liang Jushi, the partition of China would be more economic than territorial; for China to survive intact as a nation, economic rather than territorial sovereignty was key.

## **Education for Industry**

### *A Moderate Literatus*

Neither a reformer nor a revolutionary, Liang Jushi was marginal to the mainstream visions of rule and national unity. He believed that the state, while important, was less central

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<sup>42</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 4-5. See also Gregory Moore, *Defining and Defending the Open Door Policy: Theodore Roosevelt and China, 1901–1909* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1961); John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Gregory A. Barton, *Informal Empire and the Rise of One World Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2015* (London: Routledge, 2016)

to the fate of China than the people. For Liang Jushi, the state could assume different forms and names and was a mere component of the nation. In the face of imperialism, then, the nation rather than the state was at stake. Educating the people was thus more urgent than reforming the state or overthrowing the dynasty.<sup>44</sup>

Moderate Chinese literati, such as Liang Jushi, emphasized education and/or industry to save their nation, as Marianne Bastid's analysis of Zhang Jian 張謇 (1853–1926) in Nantong Prefecture, Jiangsu Province, has demonstrated.<sup>45</sup> Those prioritizing education proposed that children were an economic resource that could strengthen China with the scientific or technical expertise acquired at modern academies. They believed in nurturing patriotic and morally upright leaders who could arrest China's decline. For them, the revolutionaries were too radical; change is a gradual process, and the people should be taught their civil liberties and responsibilities for change in such a way as to be non-violent and acceptable to most people. Those prioritizing industrial entrepreneurship argued that private enterprises could benefit from mass education, which required funds from successful entrepreneurs. They believed in training specialized talent who could industrialize China based on the European experience.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 82-88.

<sup>45</sup> Marianne Bastid, *Educational Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China*, translated by Paul J. Bailey (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1988).

<sup>46</sup> Li Zhong 李忠, "Jindai Zhongguo 'jiaoyu jiuguo' yu 'shiye jiuguo' de hudong" 近代中國 '教育救國' 與 '實業救國' 的互動 (The exchange between "national salvation through education" and "national salvation through industry" in modern China), *Xinan daxue xuebao* 西南大學學報 37, no. 4 (2011): 141–148.

Liang Jushi stressed industrial progress not only because practical enterprises could apply the knowledge acquired in vocational schools but also because they could help reform the people. He was partly responding to a widespread boycott of foreign goods in China in 1905, which stemmed from anger over the implementation of anti-Chinese measures in the United States.<sup>47</sup>

The boycott could not last, Liang Jushi suggested, because the Chinese lacked the industrial capacity to manufacture their own products and reduce their reliance on foreign goods, which were superior in quality. Consumers were more interested in the quality of their purchase, and merchants, motivated by material gains rather than patriotic slogans, were more interested in profiting from selling high-quality foreign goods. Foreign powers extracted China's wealth and raw materials to fuel industries, so it was time for the Chinese to understand the source of Western power and acquire the skills for improving their own products.<sup>48</sup> China supplied the raw materials for foreign manufacturers to make and sell products for handsome profits; the roles had to be reversed so that China could benefit.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sin-Kiong Wong, *China's Anti-American Boycott Movement in 1905: A Study in Urban Protest* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 1-4.

<sup>49</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 88-90.

## *Managing Resources*

Coal and iron were key resources for industrialization at the turn of the twentieth century. As a source of power and wealth, industrial mining underlay economic imperialism and ultimately led to the scramble among the Western powers for mining concessions in China.<sup>50</sup> Liang Jushi saw that education served a purpose insofar as it could relieve China of its reliance on not only imported goods, but also foreign advisers, engineers, and technical experts, who had the blueprints, layouts, and maps of Chinese factories and infrastructure and could betray China's interests in times of war or conflict.

Practical enterprise, he declared, was “the source of education” (*shiye wei xingxue zhi quanyuan* 實業為興學之泉源). If manufacturing (*gongye* 工業) was developed, it could stimulate demand for agricultural products as well as the trade of domestically produced commodities. Once China possessed the knowledge and technology to exploit its own resources, it could compete with foreign powers both locally and globally.<sup>51</sup> He urged the Chinese to recover their “national rights” (*zhuguo zhi quanli* 主國之權利) over mining and railroads and reestablish control of their mineral resources.<sup>52</sup>

Citing his native Guangdong as an example, Liang Jushi reiterated the imperative for China to enrich itself by managing its own resources. Guangdong, he wrote, had a large

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<sup>50</sup> Shellen Wu, *Empires of Coal: Fueling China's Entry into the Modern World Order, 1860–1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

<sup>51</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 69.

<sup>52</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 130.



population and many mountains, but little arable land. Did this mean that Guangdong was predestined to be poor? No, he answered, because people and mountains were Guangdong's assets. Education could turn people into craftsmen and technicians, and reclamation could extract resources from the mountains, which were rich in minerals. The people could then know Guangdong's comparative advantages and cultivate suitable crops on the mountains for either consumption or export. Liang Jushi claimed that developing a functioning local economy would be more effective than teaching the people to respect authority and hierarchy in reducing social or political tensions—if the people are gainfully employed, he asked, why would they need to rebel or seek changes? Mountainous Guangdong was abundant in firewood and thus well-suited for the labor-intensive charcoal industry. Guangdong also had coal deposits, which could be mined by the Chinese. But the Guangdong gentry were divided into ideological camps for either reform or revolution and could not unite to protect their own resources. The link that Liang Jushi drew between mineral products and national wealth resonated with Guangdong reformer Zheng Guanying's 鄭觀應 (1842–1922) argument that British power originated in its empire of coal and colonies.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 70-72. Unlike Zheng Guanying, who advocated “building the nation through trade” (*yi shang li guo* 以商立國), Liang Jushi prioritized industry over mercantile activity.

### *Defending Guangdong*

In his letters to Liang Guorui, Liang Jushi expressed the need for the Guangdong people to arm and defend themselves by forming militias. Support for the militias would be forthcoming, he observed, because many in the province were frustrated that the British and the French could take over Guangdong's territories without a fight. The idea of raising militias and private armies in the counties and provinces was not new in the late Qing era; they were the main force that suppressed the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864). Nevertheless, this idea gained renewed significance during the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), when foreign troops looted Beijing and forced the emperor and the empress dowager to flee to Xi'an in the west of China. The governors-general of China's southern provinces refused to attack the invaders and instead concluded a neutrality pact with the powers.<sup>54</sup>

For Liang Jushi, the event exposed the vulnerability of Guangdong, even though the foreign troops were concentrated in northern China. When the pact was concluded, Li Hongzhang was the governor-general of Guangdong. While he was a shrewd politician who avoided getting embroiled in the Qing court's conflict with the foreign powers, Liang Jushi wrote, he did not have the military strength to withstand a determined foreign invasion.

Guangdong might fall into foreign hands like Taiwan, which Qiu Fengjia had unsuccessfully

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<sup>54</sup> For the implications of this incident, later called the "mutual protection pact of the southeastern provinces" (*dongnan hubao* 東南互保), for movements for local autonomy and self-expressions, see Lin Shiming 林世明, *Yihetuan shibian qijian dongnan hubao zhi yanjiu* 義和團事變期間東南互保之研究 (A study of the Mutual Defense Pact of the Southeastern Provinces during the Boxer Rebellion) (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1980).

defended against a Japanese takeover in 1895. Banditry was also rife, threatening the security of the province. Liang Jushi proposed setting up a rice trading company to supply the militias and relieve the poor to prevent them from turning to banditry. To that end, the local authorities should solicit donations from wealthy Guangdong merchants, who had profited handsomely from maritime trade.

Liang Jushi might appear quixotic for thinking that with funds, militiamen, weapons, and grain, Guangdong could overcome the neglect of the Qing state and the ambitions of the foreign powers. But for him, these were merely a means to an end. They constituted a civil defense (*qiang min feng* 強民風) by cultivating a sense of identity in the Guangdong people, who could then be galvanized into “supporting one another in difficult times” (*gongji shijian* 共濟時艱).<sup>55</sup>

### *Learning from Japan*

To promote education in Jiaying Prefecture, Liang Jushi invited Japanese scholars to help Qiu Fengjia establish the School of Japanese (Dongwen xuetang 東文學堂), which taught subjects such as science and technology and Japanese—perceived as easier to master for accessing Western knowledge. Through education, the people could remove from their

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<sup>55</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 74-82.

minds the boundaries (*jie* 界) or binaries between 1) East and West, 2) Chaozhou (Jiaying's adjoining prefecture) and Jiaying, and 3) gentry and merchant.<sup>56</sup>

Reflecting the sentiments of many Chinese literati at the time, Liang Jushi believed that China could learn more easily from Japan on how to industrialize because they belonged to the “same continent and race” (*tongzhou tongzhong* 同州同種).<sup>57</sup> His views echoed Pan-Asianism, or the ideology that Asian peoples should unite against Western imperialism, which was in vogue in the early twentieth century.<sup>58</sup> He was convinced by Meiji Japan's successful modernization that “practical enterprise was the root of all things” (*shiye wei wanshi genben ye* 實業為萬事根本也). Like China, Japan had the tradition of “emphasizing agriculture and restricting commerce” (*zhongnong yishang* 重農抑商), and yet the Japanese were quick to realize that they could strengthen their nation by generating material wealth from modern industries. They set up vocational schools for both men and women. Within years, Japan had trained a generation of skilled workers and developed a variety of industries,

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<sup>56</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 82-83. I understand *jie* as binaries rather than rivalries because, at least from Qiu Fengjia's perspective, although the new school was founded in Shantou by Chaoshan elites, it could also serve the Hakkas of Jiaying and the Hoklos of southern Fujian. In Shantou, Chaoshan merchants enjoyed cordial relations with their trading partners from Jiaying and southern Fujian, and so Qiu Fengjia had to cater to the educational needs of its diverse business community. That the Chaoshan region was a newly urbanized region developing from its treaty port of Shantou might explain why it was spared from the ethnic or lineage feuds (*xiedou* 械鬥) that had characterized the hinterland of Guangdong. See Wu Rongqing 吳榕青, “Qingmo Chaoshan liangdi tongchuang Lingdong tongwen xuetang buzheng” 清末潮汕兩地同創嶺東同文學堂補證 (Supplementary evidence on the joint establishment of Lingdong Academy in Chaozhou and Shantou), *Hanshan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 韓山師範學院學報, no. 5 (2015): 120–128.

<sup>57</sup> Reynolds, *China, 1898–1912*.

<sup>58</sup> Matten, *Imagining a Postnational World*, 19.

allowing it to catch up with the West and defeat Russia in a war. Japan thus inspired Liang Jushi's advocacy of national salvation through industry.<sup>59</sup>

### Lessons from the Colonies

In the face of Western imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese literati observed colonized nations, such as Poland, and formulated a broader worldview of anti-colonialism.<sup>60</sup> Liang Jushi was similarly inspired by Hungary, Italy, and the United States, which successfully resisted their imperialist oppressors.<sup>61</sup> He thus looked to the Western colonies in Southeast Asia for more ideas on how China could be reformed or saved. After the 1870s, he continued to visit his friends in Southeast Asia throughout his life. His friends in Nanyang kept him abreast of conditions in Southeast Asia.

Liang Jushi argued that the support of the overseas Chinese entrepreneurs and merchants in Southeast Asia was key to educating and industrializing Guangdong's prefectures. "The seafaring traders of Chaozhou and Jiaying were all over the southern seas," he wrote, "and they were all eager to fund education and care about the overall situation [in their native places]" (*Chao Jia yangshang manbu nandao, qiwu fuyou rexin jiaoyu, juanhuai daju* 潮嘉洋商滿布南島，豈無復有熱心教育，眷懷大局).<sup>62</sup> He believed that the

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<sup>59</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 91-94.

<sup>60</sup> Karl, *Staging the World*.

<sup>61</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 155.

<sup>62</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 86.

responsibility for educating the Guangdong people rested with the gentry and merchants rather than with the state.

Citing the public (*gong* 公) and private (*si* 私) universities in Europe, Japan, and the United States as examples, Liang Jushi discussed how gentry and merchants could cooperate to establish public universities by raising funds from the public, and private ones by pooling their own resources. He distinguished the locally funded public universities from the state colleges (*guanli xuetang* 官立學堂) supported by the government. He was convinced that the local academies that Qiu Fengjia and other literati founded were sustainable so long as donations from merchants, both local and overseas, were forthcoming.

The wealthiest and most successful of Guangdong's merchants hailed from Chaozhou and Jiaying prefectures; they should unite and contribute to the province regardless of administrative and cultural divisions.<sup>63</sup> Liang Jushi also hoped that the Chinese people would abandon the notion that society was divided into gentlemen, farmers, artisans, and merchants (*shi nong gong shang* 士農工商). This “discourse on the four categories of people” (*simin lun* 四民論) had become obsolete and no longer reflected the diversity of professions and trade in the increasingly global economy. It created a false impression of hierarchy and

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<sup>63</sup> Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 37. As many scholars have suggested, although Jiaying was administratively part of Guangdong and was ruled by officials stationed in Guangzhou, it was more economically and geographically linked to northeastern Guangdong and southern Fujian, including the coastal port city of Chaozhou. Jiaying did not enjoy easy riverine access to Guangzhou and the Pearl River Delta region; it was easier to reach Jiaying from southern Fujian rather than sailing the rivers and scaling the mountains that separated it from central Guangdong.

discouraged the participation of merchants in developing their ancestral villages.<sup>64</sup> For Liang Jushi, provincialism, or the natural affection of people for their home or native communities, was “the firmest surety for good government,” as suggested by Gu Yanwu.<sup>65</sup>

### *Discovering the Nanyang Chinese*

Liang Jushi’s call for greater overseas Chinese involvement in China’s affairs was part of “China’s discovery of the Nanyang Chinese” during the late Qing era. The Qing court, which also recognized the potential of its overseas subjects to reverse China’s fortunes, established consulates in British Malaya, of which Singapore was administratively a part, in the late nineteenth century.<sup>66</sup>

Huang Zunxian had served as the Qing consul in Singapore, and it was probably through him that Liang Jushi consolidated his friendship with the Jiaying business magnates of Southeast Asia, on whom the Qing government had bestowed honors and titles. Zhang Bishi, Pan Xiangchu, and Zhang Rongxuan were among the wealthiest and most prominent, with Zhang Bishi leading the pack. The Qing court recruited Zhang Bishi, who served variously as the consul in Penang and in Singapore and as the minister responsible for building or developing agriculture, business, mines, and railroads in southeast China. He

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<sup>64</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 86.

<sup>65</sup> Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 77.

<sup>66</sup> The Chinese consulates in Singapore and Penang were established in 1877 and 1893, respectively. See Ching-Hwang Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins: China’s Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch’ing Period, 1851-1911* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985), 140–141, 171.

advised Cixi to appoint merchants as industrial managers and emphasized the importance of overseas Chinese talent and wealth in industrializing China.<sup>67</sup>

In his letter to Zhang Bishi, Liang Jushi urged him to protect Guangdong's largest industries from foreign competition. By developing its own industries and thus generating its own revenues, Guangdong—alongside Fujian, which also had a large trading diaspora that could replace foreign companies in providing capital and expertise—could secure the three elements of China's modernization: talent (*cai* 才), wealth (*cai* 財), and rights (*quan* 權). For Liang Jushi, "rights" referred to the economic sovereignty of China; the three elements were also "the root of all things" (*wanshi zhi genben* 萬事之根本).<sup>68</sup>

In another letter to Zhang Bishi, Liang Jushi mentioned that the recommendations he had proposed to Zhang were forwarded to and approved by the Qing court for implementation. He had sent a few of his essays on how to build practical enterprise to Zhang Bishi for his reference. Like Bao Shichen 包世臣 (1775–1855), the Jiaqing-reign (1796–1820) reformist scholar whom William T. Rowe has studied, Liang Jushi was an "expert" who was "consulted in a broad but defined range of policy areas."<sup>69</sup> The prominence of non-bureaucratic experts had continued into the late Qing period, when, despite exponential growth in the population, the court refused to expand the formal administration. On the local

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<sup>67</sup> Godley, *The Mandarin-Capitalists from Nanyang*, 60-93.

<sup>68</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 172-173.

<sup>69</sup> William T. Rowe, *Speaking of Profit: Bao Shichen and Reform in Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 13.



administrators' own payroll, informally appointed functionaries, such as county clerks, runners, and private secretaries (*muyou* 幕友), managed the ever-increasing administrative workload.<sup>70</sup> Although Liang Jushi was a bureaucrat, his post was minor compared to that of ministers and provincial governors—the policymakers of his day. For that reason, he could only advise friends who could directly petition the court if he wanted his opinions heard or acted on. Some of Zhang Bishi's suggestions to the Qing government, such as recruiting overseas Chinese merchants like himself for official appointment and ploughing the mountains for economic gains, apparently came from Liang Jushi.<sup>71</sup>

But Zhang Bishi deserved some credit. He owned, among other things, coffee, rubber, and tea plantations, and, as the wealthiest person in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, where trade and financial activities were less regulated by the state, he substantiated Liang Jushi's claim that the private ownership of natural resources and the commercial management of extraction and distribution might work for China. Liang Jushi was not concerned about the excessive power of the state over private enterprises and local interests in China. On the contrary, he feared that the state had become too weak to improve the economy and effect industrialization, and so the gentry and merchants must step in to complete the task. While

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<sup>70</sup> Kenneth E. Folsom, *Friends, Guests, and Colleagues: The Mu-Fu System in the Late Ch'ing Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Jonathan Porter, *Tseng Kuo-fan's Private Bureaucracy* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California Press, 1972); James H. Cole, *Shaohsing: Competition and Cooperation in Nineteenth-Century China* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986); Bradley W. Reed, *Talons and Teeth: County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>71</sup> Godley, *The Mandarin-Capitalists from Nanyang*, 97.

Gu Yanwu argued that educated men, rather than state officials, were obligated to save their nation, Liang Jushi added overseas merchants into the equation.<sup>72</sup>

Liang Jushi rejected the traditional idea that China stood at the apex of human civilization; rather, he subscribed to the idea of developmentalist normativity that American-European-Japanese-style development was the norm and the teleological goal for the Chinese to accomplish.

According to Liang Jushi's logic, industrialization first emerged in Europe and was transplanted to the European colonies in Southeast Asia. Speaking in the 1900s when Cixi and the Qing government launched the New Policies to overhaul and modernize China's system of rule based on Japanese and Western models, Liang Jushi argued that it would be imprudent for China to imitate the ways of "civilized nations" (*wenming guo* 文明國) and forcefully implement their constitutions, laws, and practices, which might not suit China at its level of development. Instead, China should investigate the laws and performance of civilized colonies that hosted a substantial Chinese population, such as Hong Kong, Malaya, Taiwan, the Philippines, Canada, and Australia, where colonial officials modified metropolitan institutions to govern the Chinese according to local conditions.

Liang Jushi singled out the British colonies for their highly developed legal system, which was especially suitable for China's management of its coal deposits—coal had helped

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<sup>72</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 173.

industrialize Britain and transform it into a global empire.<sup>73</sup> China should thus adopt British laws and their system of titles and deeds to guarantee the mining and property rights of individuals, who would be incentivized to start their own practical enterprises and compete with foreign firms.<sup>74</sup>

For Liang Jushi, the legions of Chinese entrepreneurs, with their vast fields and plantations of coffee, gambier, pepper, rice, tapioca, and tea, and Chinese laborers, who mined coal, gold, and tin for their Chinese employers, practically transformed Nanyang into an overseas Chinese colony (*[Nanyang] shi woguo haiwai yi da zhimindi ye* [南洋] 實我國海外一大殖民地也). The Chinese, he suggested, possessed the cultural attributes to succeed in commercial and industrial activities. Hardworking, thrifty, and trustworthy, the Chinese were aided by the fertility of Nanyang's soils and the abundance of Nanyang's natural resources. Most of the Nanyang Chinese were natives of Guangdong, he emphasized. For him, the Chinese in Southeast Asia were both a source of support for China's industrialization and a symptom of China's weakness.

The Qing government, Liang Jushi wrote, should simultaneously improve Guangdong's economic conditions to stem the outflow of capital and labor and attract wealthy Guangdong merchants to contribute to their province's development. By establishing

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<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>74</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 140-141.

more consulates, for example, the Qing government could “preserve the national entity, relieve poverty, recover the hearts of people who left, and develop domestic industries” (*chong guoti, su minkun, wan waixiang zhi renxin, xing neidi zhi shiye* 崇國體, 蘇民困, 挽外響之人心, 興內地之實業).<sup>75</sup> “Like a fish without water, a nation without wealth will perish” (*yu shi shui ze si, guo wu cai ze wang* 魚失水則死, 國無財則亡). China had the mines, railroads, ships, and factories to enrich itself, but much of its wealth flowed to foreign powers. Practical enterprise, developed by overseas Chinese merchants and laborers who possessed the practical experience of establishing colonies in Southeast Asia, could improve China’s fortune. The state might fall, but with an educated and entrepreneurial people to preserve whatever remained, the nation would rise again.<sup>76</sup>

In the final analysis, unlike the late Qing Chinese literati and political thinkers whom Karl has described as having formulated a “Third-World,”<sup>77</sup> anti-imperialistic nationalism based on the perceived experiences of colonized peoples outside China, Liang Jushi professed little altruism or solidarity with the oppressed “natives” of Western colonies in Southeast Asia. In fact, he barely mentioned them. Neither had he established a link between his own experiences in Japan—which had in hindsight mixed institutional building with

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<sup>75</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 118-121.

<sup>76</sup> Liang Jushi, *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji*, 124-129.

<sup>77</sup> Karl, *Staging the World*.

settler colonialism to absorb Hokkaido, Ryukyu, and Taiwan into its expanding empire—and his praise of overseas Chinese-led entrepreneurship in Nanyang.<sup>78</sup>

Liang Jushi shared the desire of many Chinese literati to protect China from imperialistic interventions, but at the same time, he endorsed the British colonial project in Southeast Asia and recognized the potential of overseas Chinese entrepreneurial enterprises to lead China to economic and political revitalization. Although he did not express the hope that the Qing government would undertake its own project of building an overseas empire similar to that of the British and the Japanese, he also did not form moralistic judgments against imperialism. Strictly speaking, then, he was not an anti-imperialist who embraced the utopian visions of cultural internationalism, global integration of all nations and peoples, and a world devoid of imperialistic exploitation and political boundaries.<sup>79</sup> He acknowledged the existence of an informal Nanyang Chinese empire and settler frontier that might help reinvigorate his home province and nation.

## Conclusion

Within months of his final official appointment as minister to Belgium, Liang Jushi fell sick and returned to Jiaying, where he died in May 1911.

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<sup>78</sup> Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>79</sup> Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997)

As this chapter suggests, in Liang Jushi's final years, he entertained alternative pathways to personal success and even believed that some form of overseas Chinese economic imperialism might protect China from foreign aggression. For him, then, saving the province and nation was no longer the responsibility of only the literati or *shi* 士; anyone who was at least remotely connected to Guangdong could help protect it from partition or subjugation. His observations ultimately turned him to the south (Nanyang), rather than to the west (Europe and North America) or to the east (Japan), for solutions to China's crises and possible disintegration.

In many ways, the fall of the Qing dynasty was economic rather than political. The rise of "railway nationalism" in the Qing's final years, which saw determined protests against the court's plans to nationalize railroads and transfer control to foreign banks at the expense of local business interests, catalyzed popular anger and culminated in the Xinhai Revolution. The Qing government collapsed because officials failed to reconcile state (*guan* 官) interests with public (*gong* 公) and private (*si* 私) interests.<sup>80</sup> Liang Jushi anticipated the inability of the Qing state to do so and had placed his hopes on overseas Chinese industrial entrepreneurs to save China from foreign economic imperialism. That even moderate literati expected so little from the state might explain why it ended with a whimper.

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<sup>80</sup> En-han Lee, *China's Quest for Railway Autonomy, 1904–1911: A Study of the Chinese Railway-Rights Recovery Movement* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1977); Xiaowei Zheng, *The Politics of Rights and the 1911 Revolution in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

## **Conclusion: Chinese Provincialism Then and Now**

The main organizing principle of this dissertation is biographical. The focus lies on the careers and experiences of five Guangdong literati who formulated ideas about nation and province in late Qing China from the 1870s through the 1910s. They sought to negotiate their province's relationship with an imagined Chinese nation and propose guidelines for the regulation of power. Marginal to the dominant discourses on statist reform and revolution of their day, these fundamentally local elites articulated for their fellow provincials under Manchu rule the vision of Chinese provincialism that accompanied the rise of ethnic Han nationalism. They did not hesitate to identify with both their province and foreign values, seeing no contradiction between their diverse orientations and their nationalism. They wanted to displace northern and statist discourses on nationhood rather than separate their province from the nation. The exploration of Chinese provincialism's obscured history at the turn of the twentieth century fulfills not only historiographical purposes; it also serves to enter the discussion of central-local relations dominated by contemporary political scientists.

### *Provincialism and Revolution*

Central-local dynamics remain a crucial theme in contemporary Chinese politics, and this dissertation has made a modest effort toward historicizing such dynamics in Guangdong realities. Rather than discuss Guangdong only in light of national history, this dissertation has

traced forms of regional and global thinking within the inception of provincial identity and the tradition of provincial consciousness since the late Qing period.

“National” obligations brought He Ruzhang and Deng Chengxiu to the forefront of tributary diplomacy, whereby they had to defend Qing interests in Ryukyu and Vietnam against foreign imperialism. They discovered the extent to which the Manchu court was willing to sacrifice not only “foreign” Ryukyu and Vietnam but also Guangdong, a province of “China proper,” to save its own skin.

Through inherited knowledge, Qiu Fengjia, Ou Jujia, and Liang Jushi came to regard their province as being part of a Manchu colonial project no different from the Chinese settlements of Western-colonized Southeast Asia. They thus focused their intellectual energies on Guangdong rather than the Qing Empire, which they realized would be unable or unwilling to act in their interests. Prasenjit Duara has pointed out that provincial ties were an important organizing force for anti-Manchu revolutionary nationalists at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, most historians, excited by radicals and revolutionaries of various stripes, have continued to consign the role of provincial literati to the margins of

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<sup>1</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 183.



history.<sup>2</sup> This dissertation could thus serve as a starting point for a comparative exploration of the provincial ethos of literati in late Qing China.<sup>3</sup>

The Chinese or Xinhai Revolution of 1911 was, as numerous historians correctly suggest, a high mark for Chinese political activism. Although the historical or far-reaching significance of the revolution has been contested from time to time,<sup>4</sup> it remains the preferred point of departure for many monographs in explaining the birth of modern China. But the Republic of China was birthed within the emergence of provincialism and not, as previously believed, in millenarian revolution. When the Xinhai Revolution or, more specifically, the Wuchang Uprising broke out in October 1911, the main revolutionary leaders such as Sun Yat-sen were either abroad or unaware of the uprising. To claim that the Republic of China (ROC) was a product of revolutionary fervor simply because it began with an uprising by mutineers “influenced” by anti-Qing reactionaries obscures the more direct effect of provincial concerns and identities.

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<sup>2</sup> A notable exception is Stephen R. Platt, *Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Therefore, this dissertation is not a case study of how broad social changes led to the political transformation of China from “imperial” to “Republican,” as suggested by works such as R. Keith Schoppa, *Chinese Elites and Political Change: Zhejiang Province in the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) and Mary Backus Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China, Zhejiang Province, 1865–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> For example, historian Rana Mitter alone has in his own monographs suggested that the May Fourth Movement (1919) and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) might have been more significant than the Xinhai Revolution in China’s revolutionary past. For an exposition of this view, see Rana Mitter, “1911: The Unanchored Chinese Revolution,” *The China Quarterly* 208 (2011): 1009–1020.

Executing the plan envisioned by Ou Jujia, the Wuchang mutineers sent telegrams to the provincial assemblies, requesting that they declare independence from the Great Qing and reunite as a new Chinese republic. The Guangdong Provincial Assembly initially dismissed the appeal and even sent its own telegram to the Manchu court urging caution and warning against foreign intervention. But by late October, guilds and chambers of commerce already frustrated with foreign competition—not imperialism per se, as Liang Jushi suggested—and the Manchus’ nationalization of railway projects mobilized hundreds of their members in the streets to urge independence. Merchants threatened to withhold their financial support of the provincial assembly, and workers went on strike in support of their employers. The massive spread of civil unrest (which, I would hasten to add, stemmed primarily from concerns about Guangdong’s future) finally forced the provincial assembly to vote in favor of independence, which was declared on November 9. Qiu Fengjia, who had voted for independence, facilitated a non-violent transition of power by mediating between the militant wing of protestors under his former student Chen Jiongming 陳炯明 (1878–1933) and the provincial assembly; Chen Jiongming became the governor of Guangdong.<sup>5</sup>

This brief description of how the “revolution” occurred in Guangdong suggests that it was provincial in both form and content. Radical revolutionaries could look only to

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<sup>5</sup> Zhong Rongchi 鍾榮熾, “Xinhai Guangdong duli zhong de Guangdong ziyiju zai pingjia” 辛亥廣東獨立中的廣東咨議局再評價 (Another assessment of the Guangdong Provincial Assembly during the Xinhai Revolution), *Huanan shifan daxue xuebao* 華南師範大學學報 3, no. 3 (1988): 24–28. Chen Jiongming was a junior member of the Guangdong Provincial Assembly who openly sided with the revolutionaries.

sympathizers at best or opportunists at worst for support in the provinces that they did not control. One of these provinces was Guangdong, “the cradle of the Chinese revolution,” where, as historian Michael Tsin observes, the people remained “undisciplined” and unpoliticized into the 1920s.<sup>6</sup>

### *Provincialism and Federalism*

In the wake of revolution, federalism appeared a feasible vision for the newly independent provinces to merge and form a “United States of China.” For many governors such as Chen Jiongmeng, federalization promised to hold post-Qing China together by reducing the political tensions generated by its continental size and ethnic diversity. The fall of the Great Qing continued the cycle of unification and splitting that had characterized much of Chinese history, and the governors wanted to resolve this for good with federalization. The matter at hand was delineating the scope of authority at the provincial and national levels. The access to revenue and economic resources, deployment of military units, and mobility of goods and people across provinces were some of the features that Chen Jiongmeng and like-minded governors had to design for a federated China.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900–1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

Soon, however, federalism, or provincialism writ large, became intertwined with warlordism.<sup>7</sup> Although debates about whether federalism was suitable for China continued, warlords and provincial governments possessed de facto autonomy and thus practiced de facto federalism in the absence of a centralized, stable national authority.<sup>8</sup> What distinguished the warlords' de facto federalism from earlier incarnations such as *fanzhen* 藩鎮 and *fengjian* 封建 was their adoption of liberal, Western-inspired political vocabulary, or what Duara has called "the language of the federated nation."<sup>9</sup>

In defense of federalism, warlords and provincial literati upheld liberal values of democracy, equality, and "natural" (human) rights. Despite differences in translation, these were the same values Ou Jujia, Qiu Fengjia, and Liang Jushi had variously invoked in their own writings. This dissertation has discussed the interpretation of American and European ideas in Guangdong, whose literati were truly more inspired by "the West" than by historical precedents in their own culture or tradition. Despite this "lapse" into Eurocentrism, the dissertation has assessed ideas based on their quality rather than provenance. The ideas, regardless of origin, were relevant to twentieth-century China and beyond. Like anti- or post-colonial elites elsewhere in the world, the Guangdong literati were sustaining a global liberal

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<sup>7</sup> Whether federalists were warlords in disguise remains contested in Chinese historiography. See Arthur Waldron, "Warlordism versus Federalism: The Revival of a Debate?" *The China Quarterly* 121 (1990): 116–28.

<sup>8</sup> Tao-chiu Lam, "The Federalist Possibility? Breaking the Chinese Exceptionalism," in *Charting China's Future: Political, Social, and International Dimensions*, ed. Jae Ho Chung (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 87.

<sup>9</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 178.

project of “cultural internationalism” against rampant nationalism, the new enemy of federalism and other political forms of provincialism.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Federalist Movement of the 1920s**

#### *Guangdong under Chen Jiongming*

During the 1920s, the zenith of what might be called “the federalist movement” arrived in China. Warlords and provincial governors openly formed alliances to call for provincial autonomy and a federal system. Chen Jiongming was the strongest advocate of federalism. Ousted from the governorship of Guangdong by a clique of warlords from neighboring Guangxi for much of the 1910s, he retook the province in 1920 with an army from neighboring Fujian. He welcomed in Sun Yat-sen, who set up the Nationalist headquarters in Guangzhou.<sup>11</sup>

From his territorial base in Guangdong, Chen Jiongming promoted federalist ideas among other governors and the Beiyang government, which controlled northern China. He believed that federalism, not revolution or military unification, was the only feasible way to lay the foundation for a democratic, peaceful republic. Beginning with Guangdong as a model province for federalism in Ou Jujia’s vision, he sought to organize the United States of

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<sup>10</sup> Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). See also Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Diana Lary, *Region and Nation: The Kwangsi Clique in Chinese Politics, 1925–1937* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 29–33.

China in the manner of the American experience.<sup>12</sup> Unlike Sun Yat-sen, Chen Jiongmíng believed that Guangdong was recovering from years of warlordism and civil unrest and should not be used to fight a war of unification. He proposed that Guangdong ally itself with other provinces to force the Beiyang government to negotiate and surrender some of its powers.<sup>13</sup> He held several discussions with governors and leaders of the Beiyang government in Shanghai on how each province could draft its own constitution and manage its own affairs, in which neither the central nor other provincial governments could interfere. A referendum in Hunan allowed it to declare self-government in 1920 and implement a provincial constitution in 1921.<sup>14</sup> Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong, Sichuan, and Zhejiang followed suit and drafted their own constitutions—southern Chinese provinces were becoming federal states.<sup>15</sup>

### *Setbacks of the Movement*

By then, however, Sun Yat-sen had turned his back on federalist principles, which, not without reason, had been appropriated by feuding warlords to create their own petty

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<sup>12</sup> Leslie H. Dingyan Chen, *Chen Jiongmíng and the Federalist Movement: Regional Leadership and Nation Building in Early Republican China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1999), xi–xii.

<sup>13</sup> Qiu Qiyuan 邱啓瑗, “Sun Zhongshan yu Chen Jiongmíng guanxi zhi yanjiu” 孫中山與陳炯明關係之研究 (A study of the relationship between Sun Yat-sen and Chen Jiongmíng), *Fazhan yu qianzhan xuebao* 發展與前瞻學報 20, no. 3 (2018): 52.

<sup>14</sup> Platt, *Provincial Patriots*, 184–215.

<sup>15</sup> Lam, “The Federalist Possibility?,” 87–88.

kingdoms.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps alarmed by the success of the federalist movement, Sun Yat-sen insisted on launching the Northern Expedition to unify China by force. In 1922, Chen Jiongmíng took the federalist experiment in Guangdong on a dramatic course by revolting against Sun Yat-sen, who fled to Shanghai. He resumed his federalist program in Guangdong, only to be driven out of the province by troops loyal to the Nationalists in 1923. By then, Communist leaders such as Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) had agreed to cooperate with the Nationalists in principle on realizing the idea of *dayitong* 大一統 (political unification) for China. They thus withdrew their support from Chen Jiongmíng. Chiang Kai-shek's 蔣介石 (1887–1975) North Expedition Army was the final nail in the coffin of Chen Jiongmíng's federalist vision.<sup>17</sup>

Chen Jiongmíng and most advocates of a federated China chose the term *liansheng zizhi* 聯省自治 for their movement. As political scientist Tao-chiu Lam suggests, the Chinese federalists rejected the term *lianbang* 聯邦 to protect the movement from attacks by the centralizers. But this also points to the weakness of the movement. By avoiding the term *lianbang*, the federalists yielded to the “tradition” of the centralized, unified state.<sup>18</sup> In 1928, while in exile, Chen Jiongmíng published a political treatise titled *Zhongguo tongyi chuyi* 中

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<sup>16</sup> Qi Guangyu 齊光裕, “Sun Zhongshan lianbang guandian yu liang'an fazhan” 孫中山聯邦觀點與兩岸發展 (Development of cross-straits federal system from the views of Sun Yat-sen), *Fazhan yu qianzhan xuebao* 14, no. 1 (2016):6.

<sup>17</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 177–204.

<sup>18</sup> Lam, “The Federalist Possibility?,” 88.

國統一芻議 (A proposal for the unification of China). In it he continued to explain the benefits of federalism for both the central government and the provinces.<sup>19</sup> Like Qiu Fengjia, albeit in a different context, Chen Jiongming felt the need to redeem himself in history. He had to clarify that he was claiming Guangdong for a better China and not, as previously accused by the Nationalists, for himself. But in the victors' history, federalism was the whipping boy of what might be considered pro-centralization nationalism. In the Nationalists' "party education" (*danghua jiaoyu* 黨化教育), Chen Jiongming "betrayed the father of the nation" (*beipan guofu* 背叛國父). For the Communists, he was an "anti-revolutionary warlord" (*fan geming junfa* 反革命軍閥).<sup>20</sup>

As Duara explains, "the interplay of power politics and authoritative language enabled the hegemonic, centralizing nationalist narrative to destroy and ideologically bury the federalist alternative early in the history of modern China."<sup>21</sup> Historian Steven Phillips correctly notes that federalism failed because nationalist elites demonized it and led the people to think that federalism indicated a return to a premodern and oppressive past.<sup>22</sup> Since the late 1920s, federalism has been dismissed as either a colonial mentality left over from foreign imperialism or a feudal remnant from China's backward past. Instead of being known

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<sup>19</sup> Chen Jiongming, *Zhongguo tongyi chuyi* (Hong Kong: unknown publisher, 1928).

<sup>20</sup> Qiu, "Sun Zhongshan yu Chen Jiongming guanxi zhi yanjiu," 45.

<sup>21</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 177–78.

<sup>22</sup> Steven Phillips, "The Demonization of Federalism in Republican China," in *Defunct Federalisms: Critical Perspectives on Federal Failure*, ed. Emilian Kavalski and Magdalena Zolkos (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 88.



as a stronghold of the federalist movement, Guangdong was considered and fashioned into the cradle of revolution in both Communist and Nationalist ideologies and was thus spared the “notoriety” of Chen Jiongming.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, China was mired in both civil and foreign wars and remained politically disintegrated. During this period, the Communists, who were scattered and militarily weaker than either the Japanese or the Nationalists, adopted the so-called Yan’an tradition, a highly decentralized structure of governance whereby county-level cadres implemented policies according to local conditions (*yindi zhiyi* 因地制宜). Local governance “flourished” during the entire revolutionary era (1921–1949). However, it was caricatured as a political expediency, incompatible with the highly centralized state the Communists were trying to create after they overran the whole of China in 1949.<sup>23</sup>

## **Provincialism in Post-1949 Chinese Historiography and Politics**

### *The Impact of History*

The issue of central-local relations did not end with the founding of the People’s Republic of China, however. Scholars, especially political scientists, have asked why China, despite its continental size and diseconomies of scale, has been a unitary system that allows more power for the central government at the expense of local autonomy since 1949. Why are

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<sup>23</sup> Jae Ho Chung, *Centrifugal Empire: Central-Local Relations in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 73.

Chinese leaders so suspicious of local intent, which they associate with political instability and state weakness? Political scientist Jae Ho Chung, the foremost scholar on contemporary central-local relations in China, believes that answers to these questions lie in history. Intergenerational transmissions of memories of a divided center, Chung suggests, have kept them alive in the minds of Chinese leaders.<sup>24</sup> However, Chung has assumed rather than proven these “resilient perceptual undercurrents.”<sup>25</sup>

This dissertation, then, has substantiated the nature of such undercurrents by pinpointing provincialism as the most important factor in shaping and conditioning territorial dynamics and central-local relations. It historicizes the question of why China’s central state and the idea of political centralization have proven so resilient. What real-time historical actors thought about central-local relations is as important as propaganda, national or party reeducation, and capacity building for assessing the impact of the state on provincial autonomy and identity. As this dissertation has suggested, many Guangdong literati of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries found it impossible to imagine their province’s survival without being part of an empire or “nation.” They believed that Guangdong must unite with other “Chinese” provinces to benefit from economies of scale in resisting foreign imperialism effectively and constitute a more powerful “China.”

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<sup>24</sup> Chung, *Centrifugal Empire*, 2–3.

<sup>25</sup> Chung, *Centrifugal Empire*, 3.

Jae Ho Chung is nonetheless correct when he says that the impact of history, or the power of path dependence,<sup>26</sup> has made the province the largest, most effective subnational unit in Chinese governance. As historian John Fitzgerald suggests, the province is significant as a territorial unit for building and maintaining a “rational, stable, and predictable national state”—a “minimum condition” for the free-market system that China has been trying to embrace.<sup>27</sup> However, while the province is a convenient tool of governance for smaller administrative units that are too complex and numerous for the state’s direct attention, it is also in many ways a mini-nation commanding sufficient resources to challenge a weakened national state. Consequently, presumptive distrust becomes perpetual distrust. By highlighting the cultural, economic, and military successes of centralized empires such as the Han, Tang, and Ming and downplaying those of decentralized dynasties such as the North and South Dynasties and the Five Dynasties, the Communist regime has made centralization the only historically and politically acceptable form of rule, especially during the totalitarian Maoist era (1949–1976), when a “highly dogmatic and ideological nature of the Communist rule” temporarily grounded the expression of provincial identity to a halt and disrupted China’s “centrifugal tradition.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Path dependence is defined as “a process in which past decisions and present developments have closed certain options for a future action, thereby setting future developments along a particular course.” See Chung, *Centrifugal Empire*, 53.

<sup>27</sup> John Fitzgerald, “Introduction,” in *Rethinking China’s Provinces*, edited by John Fitzgerald (London: Routledge, 2002), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Chung, *Centrifugal Empire*, 16.

But despite their centrifugal tendencies, provinces have remained “the most indispensable agents for local governance.”<sup>29</sup> Since the end of the Mao era, Beijing has wanted provincial governors to manage sub-provincial units on behalf of the state. Chinese leaders are opposed to allowing them to be independent principals, that is, those who adopt a leading and proactive role in any activity for their own interests. Beijing is also constantly worried about “outside hostile forces” (*waibu didui shili* 外部敵對勢力) that might take advantage of provincialism and undermine its sovereignty from the periphery—Hong Kong has been portrayed as a negative example.<sup>30</sup> The central state has thus strengthened vertical lines of command to consolidate the provinces’ leverage over sub-provincial units. It also limited communication between provincial governments to prevent the formation of horizontal alliances that might be used against the center.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, Beijing has generally ignored the rule of avoidance that prohibited provincial leaders from serving in their home provinces. Like the literati discussed in this dissertation, Chinese leaders recognize the need for provincial officials to be well tuned to

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<sup>29</sup> Chung, *Centrifugal Empire*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> Jae Ho Chung, “Charting China’s Future: Scenarios, Uncertainties, and Determinants,” in Chung, *Charting China’s Future*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Chung, *Centrifugal Empire*, 64. See also John Donaldson, “Provinces: Paradoxical Politics, Problematic Partners,” in *China’s Local Administration: Traditions and Changes in the Sub-National Hierarchy*, ed. Jae Ho Chung and Tao-chiu Lam (London: Routledge, 2009), 14–38; and John Donaldson, ed., *Assessing the Balance in Central-Local Relations in China* (London: Routledge, 2017).

specific local conditions.<sup>32</sup> This policy strengthens the ethos of each province, which R. Kent Guy has already identified in his study of Qing-dynasty governors.<sup>33</sup>

### *Revisiting Federalism*

The 1989 Tiananmen Incident has regenerated interest in federalism, albeit mainly among the dissidents in political exile. After its virtual disappearance from political discourse for six decades, federalism became a desirable political form for intellectuals such as Yan Jiaqi 嚴家其 (1942–), the former director of the Institute of Political Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Yan Jiaqi proposed a Chinese federation to resolve domestic differences, satisfy the aspiration of Tibetans for genuine self-rule, and unite with Taiwan. Other famous dissidents such as Chen Yizi 陳一咨 (1940–2014) and Wu Jiaxiang 吳稼祥 (1955–) have echoed similar views. Together they argue that China should have different central-local relations for different regions. The strength of these relations or links, they suggest, should vary according to local demands.<sup>34</sup> Like the Guangdong literati of the past, these new federalists believe that democracy can strengthen rather than weaken central authority. Unlike the Guangdong literati, however, they are facing a strong state and have little support from foreign powers or the Chinese diaspora. As a result, as political scientist

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<sup>32</sup> Chung, *Centrifugal Empire*, 64–66.

<sup>33</sup> R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644–1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Lam, “The Federalist Possibility?,” 88–91.

Tao-chiu Lam notes, federalist ideas are discussed in small intellectual circles and enjoy limited influence. The political clout of these new federalists is hardly comparable to that of the 1920s federalist movement.<sup>35</sup>

Other political scientists are more sanguine about the prospects of federalism in China. Zheng Yongnian argues that economic decentralization in the 1980s, following the state's failure at collectivization and rationing, as well as globalization since the 1990s, have forced the Chinese state to institutionalize de facto federalism.<sup>36</sup> He shares Chung's observations but interprets them as federalization in practice. For him, economic and fiscal federalism due to domestic and external pressures has led to political federalism, although the Chinese state refuses to admit it publicly. Whether such federalism is real, provincial authorities enjoy a high degree of autonomy than what is expected in authoritarian China.

### **Implications for Guangdong**

#### *Provincialism as a Platform for Thinking Central-Local Relations*

It should be obvious by now that although this dissertation is a historical work, it has started with observations about the present. Most of these observations are inspired by political scientists, who nonetheless have not adequately historicized provincial autonomy and identity in China. Dissatisfied with research on nationhood during the Qing-Republican

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<sup>35</sup> Lam, "The Federalist Possibility?," 91.

<sup>36</sup> Zheng Yongnian, *De Facto Federalism in China: Reforms and Dynamics of Central-Local Relations* (Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 2007).

transition that generalizes by lumping the population of the entire Qing Empire into the category of “Chinese people,” this dissertation has focused on a single province. Because Guangdong has been known as the cradle of the Chinese revolution, it is interesting and somewhat surprising to detect sprouts of provincial identity developing there at the turn of the twentieth century. As for why famous literati such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao are only mentioned in passing, their stories have been analyzed in important works by Hao Chang, Xiaobing Tang, and Peter Zarrow.<sup>37</sup>

More importantly, as noted earlier, this dissertation is not primarily about provincialism as oppositional politics. Rather, it examines provincialism as a platform for thinking central-local relations and building a nation. Its goal in highlighting literati such as (or especially) Qiu Fengjia, Ou Jujia, and Liang Jushi has been to reveal in political alternatives. In the end, what do these alternatives tell us about the history and politics of twentieth-century Guangdong?

The literati discussed in this dissertation represented an early generation of Guangdong natives who fulfilled their historical mission of safeguarding the province from revolutionary violence. None of them advocated that provincials take up arms to resist the

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<sup>37</sup> Hao Chang, *Liang Ch’i-chao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890–1907* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning, 1890–1911* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885–1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

Manchus. Even Ou Jujia, supposedly the most belligerent of the group, emphasized self-defense rather than a military takeover of neighboring provinces. All were pioneers in soliciting support from overseas Chinese—a policy adopted by Beijing to open the Special Economic Zones to foreign investment during the reform era. Although they have fallen into political oblivion, this dissertation has traced the trajectory of their limited prominence during their time and, here in the conclusion, explained their ultimate disappearance from the history and politics of the present. The current Chinese state seeks lessons from the past and remains attentive to centrifugal or provincial forces. This undermines the common scholarly assumption that the profoundest sociocultural transformations occurred during the “long” twentieth century.

Consider esteemed sociologist Ezra F. Vogel’s monographs on the so-called socialist transformation of post-1949 Guangdong. For *Canton Under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968* (1969), Vogel could not access archival documents on the institutional workings of provincial government in Guangdong (he could not enter China then). But he was able to mine local newspapers and interview refugees in Hong Kong and shed considerable light on the behavioral patterns of both individual and bureaucratic actors in provincial politics. He suggested that bureaucratic “conservatism” and Guangdong provincialism were somehow fused in local governance. State directives generally discouraged experimentation, especially when the political stakes were high. If



circumstances forced deviations to occur, they could be explained away as local variants of the projected outcome subject to a unique set of conditions.<sup>38</sup>

Then, for *One Step Ahead in China: Guangdong Under Reform* (1989), Vogel could finally conduct in-depth interviews with bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, and grassroots leaders in Guangdong. Entrepreneurial strategies, he suggested, often combined traditional personal networks and modern industrial organization. He confirmed that Guangdong's economic success was indeed based on reform from the bottom—the state was an obstacle to rather than an initiator of development.<sup>39</sup> Does this not bring us back to the issue we have with the obscured literati of late Qing Guangdong? These literati passed on before the Xinhai Revolution and left few writings from which to trace their actions and thoughts, and the state always looms larger than non-state affiliates on record than in reality.

### *Reclaiming Local Identity*

Guangdong's proximity to Hong Kong has again allocated it a special role in China's economic reforms since the 1980s. This also means that the province is not a homogeneous unit in terms of economic development, which is dependent on logistical distance from the outside world. No longer a monopoly of the north where most of the capital cities of ancient

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<sup>38</sup> Ezra F. Vogel, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

<sup>39</sup> Ezra F. Vogel, *One Step Ahead in China: Guangdong Under Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

dynasties were located, the civilizing force in the Chinese historical imagination has migrated southward. Since the reform era, the maritime world has been seen as a source of civilization in its own right.

An early sign of this trend came from the reimagination of the Chinese nation to include the southern state of Chu that existed before the ancient era of Confucius. A representation of the south, Chu culture is depicted in some Chinese publications as largely indigenous. In the 1990s, national exhibitions celebrated Chu culture, and museums in southern China showcased artifacts that suggested a vibrant maritime culture of the south. Subsequently, monographs about other ancient southern kingdoms such as Wu and Yue also appeared. Southern Chinese intellectuals contended that China's future lay not with the agrarian, bureaucratic, and landlocked North leading an anti-imperialist struggle but with the dynamic, innovative, and maritime South long in favor of foreign exchanges.

This "southern nationalism" espoused China's tradition of commercial dynamism, overseas contact, and social openness distinct from the moribund North absorbed in the politics of a land empire. The surge in interest in the south as an alternative source of national power did not necessarily promote a separate southern identity. After all, it merely challenged the state's ability to represent the nation and attempted to liberate the idea of nation from the state's control.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, it still had its detractors. In a situation that political scientist

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<sup>40</sup> R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 197.

Edward Friedman has called a “northern anti-imperialism” versus “hopeful nationalism” of the south, Beijing officials argued that southern openness to international exchange would encourage southerners to despise their poorer compatriots in the north, lead a political life independent of the party and state, and expose the entire country to undesirable foreign influences and intervention. Some conceded that Guangdong is a “traditional base for insurrection” and that “the south will rise again.”<sup>41</sup>

This observation coincided with Harvard professor Wei-ming Tu’s argument that “the center no longer has the ability, insight, or legitimate authority to dictate the agenda for cultural China,” and the periphery, which included Guangdong, would set the cultural and economic agenda for the center, thereby undermining its political effectiveness.”<sup>42</sup> Without necessarily echoing Tu’s statements, southern Chinese scholars enjoyed a surge of pride in the heritage and newfound wealth of their provinces and no longer imagined themselves as a people descended from an isolated, northern-plain culture. Instead, they suggested that the Chinese people are a product of cultural exchanges between the north and the south and elsewhere. This decentering of Chinese culture, or subtle resistance, might have stemmed from general dissatisfaction in the south with the Cultural Revolution and Maoist policies. As Friedman puts it, “a new national project seems a palpable reality in a mobile south China

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<sup>41</sup> Edward Friedman, “Reconstructing China’s National Identity: A Southern Alternative to Mao-Era Anti-Imperialist Nationalism,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 1 (1994): 80–83.

<sup>42</sup> Wei-ming Tu, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center,” *Daedalus* 120, no. 2 (1991): 1–32.

that reaches out through the Chinese diaspora to the world.”<sup>43</sup> Guangdong can thus assume an important role in this project.

Built in Guangzhou in 1988, the Museum of the Mausoleum of the Nanyue King preserves the glories of the ancient Nanyue kingdom (204–111 BCE). Many of its exhibits were excavated from the tomb of the Nanyue king Zhao Mei (r. 137–122 BCE) in 1983. For Beijing officials, they are treasures of the Han civilization. But for provincial officials, the tomb’s cultural sophistication symbolizes a long, cultivated past that evolved independently of northern China. Both Beijing and Guangdong do agree, however, that Lingnan was never completely separated from the Han civilization as was Vietnam. That shared understanding, whether driven by Chinese nationalism or nostalgia for an autonomous past, is crucial to their cooperation in fostering provincial pride for nationalist purposes.<sup>44</sup> In recent years, both Beijing and Guangdong authorities have collaborated to highlight the province’s role as an important port on the so-called ancient Maritime Silk Road that linked China with Southeast Asia.<sup>45</sup> Provincial identity thus produces a supplement to the hegemonic Chinese nationalism that is purportedly based in the north.

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<sup>43</sup> Friedman, “Reconstructing China’s National Identity,” 85.

<sup>44</sup> Diana Lary, “The Tomb of the King of Nanyue—The Contemporary Agenda of History: Scholarship and Identity,” *Modern China* 22, no. 1 (1996): 3–27.

<sup>45</sup> Ying-kit Chan, “Cultural Heritage on China’s 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road: The Case of Guangdong Province,” *China Report* 54, no. 2 (2018): 159–74.

In 2010, Beijing proposed that Guangzhou's main television station stop broadcasting in Cantonese during prime time on its main channels and switch to Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese). The people of Guangdong responded with flash mob events where people sang Cantonese songs in public places. At a memorial park, some chanted an obscene Cantonese-language battle cry that came from Ming-dynasty general Yuan Chonghuan 袁崇煥 (1584–1630), a native of Guangdong, to protest Beijing's proposal.<sup>46</sup> A comprehensive cultural analysis of the national imaginary in Guangdong must await another time. Suffice it to say that despite the so-called profound transformations of China during the twentieth century, provincial identity remains a potent force in local politics today.

For the Chinese state, Guangdong has had the “peripheral advantage” of being the province to experiment with radical foreign ideas and contain possible excesses of implementation—the impact of economic and political disruptions would not threaten the core areas surrounding the capital or metropolitan centers.<sup>47</sup> The Qing-dynasty Canton System of restricting foreign trade to the port of Guangzhou is an example. The establishment of post-reform Special Economic Zones, most of which are in Guangdong, is another. Guangdong had also served as a center of the 1920s federalist movement. That the period of provincial or federalist experimentation in China bridged the “imperial” and the “modern” as

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<sup>46</sup> “Cantonese up in arms as battle cry vanishes,” *South China Morning Post*, July 15, 2010, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/article/719737/cantonese-arms-battle-cry-vanishes>.

<sup>47</sup> Zheng, *De Facto Federalism in China*, 238.

well as coincided with major international events suggests that, for much of the twentieth century, it was provincialism that mediated between China and the world. The provincial mind connected the nexus between local and global concerns.

Therefore, the newly imagined Guangdong of the twentieth century and the provincialism that it entailed was not, as the word “provincial” implies, confined to a nativist habitat, even if it indulged in the idea of limited separation from other provinces and the centralized state. In the writings of our five Guangdong literati, we see direct references to or hear echoes of American federalists, European Enlightenment thinkers, Japanese Pan-Asianists, and others. They might have espoused an identity that subtly resisted the impulses of centralized rule and foreign imperialism, but their vision was based on an inclusive order in their province in contrast to the reformers and revolutionaries who would configure nationalism as a tool to distinguish China from the Qing Empire and from the world at large. Receiving foreign attention or support was always a goal for them, and they worked to ensure that the norms and institutions of the global system could accommodate the idea of Chinese provincialism.

With this assumption of Chinese provincialism’s globality, I propose the following definition of Chinese provincialism, albeit one that is perhaps more applicable to Guangdong of the twentieth century than to other provinces. It is more a set of political attitudes than a collective of closely linked ideas.

## Chinese Provincialism in Guangdong

### *Provincialism Supports a Flexible Form of Nationalism*

Provincialism is more than a mere subset of nationalism. The “nation” that provincially oriented literati had in mind was not fixed. Ou Jujia was more concerned about the configuration of central-local relations in post-Qing China than about liberal values such as democracy, equality, and human rights. Although he appeared given to the idea of a cultural or ethnic nationalism, he emphasized a nation-in-waiting with Guangdong declaring independence first and inspiring other provinces to follow suit later. Qiu Fengjia and Liang Jushi wanted to build the capacity for Guangdong to defend itself against foreign imperialism. For these literati, whether “China” was Qing or Republican was less important than imbuing the province with a strong sense of empathy for not only fellow provincials but also the “Chinese,” who shared a common culture, ethnicity, and language in other provinces. In their formulation, Guangdong could become a model province or even provisional nation into which other provinces would merge to form a new China. Provincialism was thus a form of nationalism because it expressed how the nation should function.

The nation here was certainly imagined. It was not so much a primordial community as an experiment in self-governance. This nationalism was dynamic and rejected the chauvinism and revolutionary violence (which was also committed by reformers such as Kang Youwei) derived from navel-gazing about the nation. Nevertheless, the Guangdong

literati did not deny that their province was part of the Chinese nation, whichever form it would assume. One could only wonder what they would think if they had seen a China mired in warlordism and political chaos after the fall of the Qing. For them, perhaps, the reformers and revolutionaries were overly idealistic and politically immature. Although the Guangdong literati believed that their province should adopt models that had benefited other nations, they had exercised greater caution in applying them to China.

*Provincialism Is a Gradualist Yet Dynamic Idea*

As far as the Guangdong literati were concerned, reforms and revolutions that aimed for nearly complete change were risky. The failure of the Hundred Days' Reform to gain support from conservatives suggested that the political stakes were high. For Qiu Fengjia, Ou Jujia, and Liang Jushi, reforming the Qing government, overthrowing it, or establishing a modern republic was a noble goal, but their failures could mean the death of hundreds or thousands. Why not develop education and industry first to prepare the people for nationhood? And what better place to test the results of education and industry for nationhood than the province, for which people should feel a greater affinity than for an imagined nation? This cautiousness explained why the literati discussed in this dissertation were neither reformers nor revolutionaries as pigeonholed by many historians.

But their cynicism never precluded a belief in change. The Guangdong literati stressed education and industry because such social projects espoused gradual but dynamic



reform of minds and manpower resources. They believed that progress through careful deliberation was more sustainable than sudden, violent ruptures. The glacial processes set in motion might lead to the withering of provincial identity in favor of nationhood, but these literati would continue to promote provincial consciousness both in Guangdong and other provinces as a prerequisite for a truly comprehensive and genuine national identity. Ultimately, they anchored their advocacy in humility and pragmatism. Provincialism in Guangdong was thus a practical discourse of power that challenged the utopian claims of nationalism in the late Qing Empire.

### *Provincialism Is a Form of Political Mediation*

At the risk of stating the obvious, the province does not exist without being part of a sovereign nation. Despite its open-endedness, then, provincialism has a definite terminus—nationhood. Consider Qiu Fengjia's attempts to found schools for all the Cantonese, Hakka, and Teochew peoples in Guangdong. As a *modus vivendi*, provincialism was a short-term compromise between localist divides along cultural, ethnic, and linguistic lines and nationalist ambitions of homogeneity and collective strength. To balance multiple interests in a diverse province, the Guangdong literati stressed deliberation and established or proposed institutions that facilitated such deliberation. This is perhaps why all the literati described in this dissertation were enthusiasts or sponsors of education. Modern, liberal (Western-style) academies represented institutionalized deliberation. In the schools founded by Deng

Chengxiu, Qiu Fengjia, and Liang Jushi, various trades and technical skills that would help industrialize China were taught. Exposure to foreign disciplines and ideas and the intellectual freedom to debate and express them allowed students to form their own judgments about political issues. An unintended consequence was the production of educated youth who would join the revolutionary camp. Provincialism thus amalgamated diverse local identities and allowed for the translation of ideas into political actions.

### *Provincialism Is Transnational in Scope*

Guangdong was part of a maritime China that anthropologist G. William Skinner has not incorporated in his influential thesis on the physiographic macroregions of China. An extensive capital and labor network stretching from southern China through Vietnam and parts of Cambodia and Siam (Thailand) to both coasts of the Malay Peninsula connected Guangdong with its settlers in Nanyang (Southeast Asia). Guangdong's proximity to rice-producing regions made it a gateway for foreign rice importation and internal and regional distribution through the Pearl River Delta. Guangdong's surplus male population was a source of indentured workers for developing the American Pacific coast and parts of colonized Southeast Asia. The network of Guangdong laborers, merchants, and intermediaries constituted a maritime commercial empire not unlike that of the Fujian people or even the British Empire of the nineteenth century.

The Guangdong literati, especially Ou Jujia, understood the basis of Guangdong's prosperity to be maritime trade. Guangdong was thus in the position to become the first independent province to counter the threat of an imperialistic partition of China and to spearhead the formation of a federated Chinese nation. First invented as an administrative unit, Guangdong acquired complex, diverse meanings during its historical existence. The idea of Guangdong became an ideological force that overlapped with nationalism and revolution. Under the Guangdong literati, this force transcended culture, ethnicity, and language in the spirit of an inclusive, transnational provincial identity.

### **Provincialism for the Future: Whither Guangdong?**

Geographer Tim Oaks has identified the resurgence of provincial identities in China as a result of economic reforms, commercial development, fiscal decentralization, and local specialization. The result was the broader, implicit project of cultural geography, whereby provinces and regions were being distinguished as coherent cultural units. For each province, then, promoting Chineseness became a unique feature of regional culture. Such Chineseness served to connect localities to broader networks of power that included the national scale of China, the supranational scale of "Greater China" (including Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan), and the global scale of transnational capital. In their attempt to "scale-up" local, place-based identities to match the discrete space within a provincial boundary, elites in particularly poor, interior provinces unwittingly reduced identity to a set of marketable

cultural markers. Oaks offered three examples: Anhui, the birthplace of many philosophers, was reduced to a “philosophy culture”; Shanxi, known as a repository of Chinese traditions, was reduced to a source of “ancient Oriental civilization”; and Guizhou, inhabited by many minorities, was reduced to “a pristine environment and a conservative refuge of China’s traditions.” Provincials had to embrace the dubious distinction cultivated by elites in order to pursue the external connections that promised to deliver prosperity.<sup>48</sup>

In the case of Guangdong, its elites and officials packaged revolution and maritime trade as their province’s traditions and sold them as a provincial culture in the global capitalist marketplace. In the mix is Chineseness, which negotiates a political tension between central authority and provincial autonomy. It remains to be seen, then, if Guangdong, the so-called cradle of Chinese revolution and starting point of the Chinese Maritime Silk Road, can assume its next important role for the state—to meaningfully include neighboring, centrifugal Hong Kong and Macau in its visions of the past and of the future.<sup>49</sup> In response to simmering dissent in Tibet, Xinjiang, and now in Hong Kong, many Chinese have perpetuated a nationalism that decries diversity, having wrongly believed that

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<sup>48</sup> Tim Oaks, “China’s Provincial Identities: Reviving Regionalism and Reinventing ‘Chineseness,’” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (2000): 667–92.

<sup>49</sup> In recent years, the Chinese government has launched the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (Yue Gang Ao dawanqu 粵港澳大灣區) initiative, which promises to strengthen the economic infrastructure linking Hong Kong and Macau to Guangdong. Many people in Hong Kong worry that economic integration is simply a euphemism for greater political control from Beijing. Their fear is manifested in the 2019 Hong Kong anti-extradition bill protests, which have undermined business and public confidence in both the local administration and its backers in Beijing.

disunity and political disintegration were anomalies in their mythical past as a millennia-old nation. If anything, this dissertation has shown that China's nationalist imagination only emerged during the late Qing period and has been dynamic and inconsistent ever since. "China" remains a contested idea derived from competing visions of culture, history, and nation. As a result, conceptions of China have not achieved the union of ethnicities, groups, and interests desired by the Chinese government.

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